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It's just this animal called culture: Regulatory Codes and Resistant Action among Dagara Female Musicians

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It's just this animal called culture: Regulatory Codes and Resistant Action among Dagara Female Musicians

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2011

For Georgina,

who revolutionized me

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of the Dagara men and women who shared their stories and experiences with me. Thank you for welcoming me into your lives and homes, and for allowing me to become a part of your community. I take full responsibility for any misrepresentations or errors included in these pages.

To my friends, I thank you for encouraging me, and for bringing light and joy to even my darkest moments. I would especially like to thank Kim Kattari for being an irreplaceable writing partner, for spurring me on when I thought I could do no more, and for being a member of Team Rosie. To Melanie Morgan, Ryan McCormack, Mark Lomanno, Andres Amado, and Travis Cumbo, thank you for reading drafts, for listening to me talk through my mental thicket, and for creating an atmosphere of collegiality and friendship. Many thanks to Dennis Rathnaw for clocking more hours listening to me talk through this work from start to finish than anyone else, and for reminding me where the road was if I got lost.

I owe any successes I have had in large part to my family. For my mother, who taught me to love books and to treasure kindness, and my father, who taught me to love people and to stand again after ever defeat. For my grandfather Sid, who taught me to love learning, and my grandmother Rose who showed me strength, and an undying love for life. To my family, I thank you for standing behind the pursuit of my dreams, however far reaching or far away.

I would not have been able to complete this project without the support of several research and writing fellowships. My field research was made possible by the Patrice Lumumba Fellowship provided by the University of Texas at Austin, Warfield Center for African and African American Studies, and a dissertation grant from the Center for

Women's and Gender Studies. Also, the Woodrow Wilson Women's Studies Dissertation Fellowship provided by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

Finally, I would like to thank my committee under the direction of Veit Erlmann for their extraordinary support and insight. In particular, Sonia Seeman and Susan Heinzelman are two of the finest mentors anyone could hope for. Thank you for showing me what is possible.

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Publication No._____

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisor: Veit Erlmann

This dissertation is an exploration of the African female body as a site of regulation and resistance. Based on ethnographic fieldwork among the Dagara of northwestern Ghana, I illustrate how Dagara women are regulated through narratives of exclusion, through the mobilization of the rhetoric of tradition and cultural authenticity, and the racialization of gender ideologies. I then illustrate how Dagara women carve resistant spaces through song writing, dance, and instrumental performance, pointing to how female bodies in performance essay critiques of existent power structures. I argue that Dagara women redefine the terms of their sexed bodies through performance, as they open up new cultural possibilities. By mediating multiple categories of belonging, Dagara women expand the narrow demarcations that are mapped onto their bodies. Such divisive categories of African/Western, black/white, and traditional/modern are challenged through musical performance. Dagara women subvert regulation in ways that are instructive in re-theorizing the possibilities of resistant and transgressive action.

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•PROLOGUE•

"For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support."[1] Those words of Audre Lorde's illustrate the goals of this project, which has been a project of not only dismantling power hierarchies, but shedding light on ways of acting and being that don't fit squarely within easily defined categories.

In this project I point to silences in the narratives of Dagara cultural experiences and musical performances. This includes opening a space for the voices and stories of Dagara men and women without access to power structures to be heard. More than to be heard, to be regarded with the same weight as powerful voices from within the community and to be heard at the same volume as scholarly voices. I strove to evoke the realities of the social conditions of Dagara people's lives—and to demonstrate how those conditions impact their choices, their strategies of resistance and resource building and the music they make. I show how narratives of cultural authenticity, tradition, and the racialization of gender ideologies are mobilized as regulatory tactics—and demonstrate how men and women subvert such tactics by producing counternarratives of cultural authenticity and provide new cultural possibilities. By investigating the categories that are mapped on people's bodies, I show how they mediate those categories, bridging the

[1] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools will never Dismantle the Master's House," in *This Bridge called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,* ed. Cherríe L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983), 94-131.

gap between "ours" and "theirs," showing sameness in difference. It is important to me to reveal the relationships between women as central to strategies of resistance and resource building, and as an integral aspect of Dagara women's identities. I recognize and celebrate women's ways of speaking, music making, and connecting to each other, and create a space where the moments shared between women are central to the dialogue. Most of all, I locate non-oppositional strategies of resistance in musical performance, which becomes a site in which Dagara women actively re-write narratives of gender, race, and ethnicity, re-define the categories that are inscribed on their bodies, and essay critiques of restrictive structures.

Narrative Style

My narrative style is based on a desire to balance cultural critique with a way of writing that resonates with the people I worked with. As other writers have noted[2] this is challenging because the act of breaking something apart to analyze it replicates the very power structures that are being critiqued. Both Cusick and Minh-Ha liken certain modes of inquiry and analysis to gendered forms of violence. Like Minh-ha I use narrative techniques such as interrupted speech, non-linear story telling, and presenting ideas that weave in and out of the text, which are re-examined and continued throughout. I embrace polyvocality and multi-dimensional levels of speaking, which reveal layers of meanings and sounds of speech, and what lies beneath the speech. To "speak nearby instead of speaking about" as Minh-Ha

[2] Suzanne G. Cusick, "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort not to Think Straight," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, eds. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, [1994] 2006), 76-77; Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 48-49.

suggests[3] allows me a way of dialoguing that does not objectify other subjects, but allows a privileging of conversations and provides possibilities for more collaborative modes of engagement.

I intentionally chose to rely upon dialogue and relationship building in order to locate sameness in difference, as Abu-Lughod proposes,[4] at the same time problematizing my social location, which as Alcoff declares, is epistemically salient to all claims being made and what effect those claims will have.[5] This technique allowed for what Spivak terms the production of countersentences.[6] This also necessitates listening to alternative ways of speaking that have been excluded from previous works, and including musical performance, dance, and daily performativities as forms of speaking. This results in what Cixous and Irigaray term *l'écriture féminine,* a new way of writing that challenges the linear, masculinist, and truth claiming ethnographic accounts.[7]

I was influenced by Michelle Kisliuk's evocative "performance ethnography."[8] In a similar manner, by making myself part of the text, but only one of the voices, I highlight the relationships between people. By focusing on individuals and their changing, shifting relationships, I demonstrate how, as Abu-Lughod notes, people

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[3] Nancy N. Chen, "Speaking Nearby: A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha," *Visual Anthropology Review* 8 no. 1 (Spring 1992): 87.
[4] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Can there be Feminist Ethnography?" *Women and Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory* 5 no.1 (1990): 7-27
[5] Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991-92): 12.
[6] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313
[7] Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs* 1 no. 4 (Summer, 1976): 875-893; Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is not One*, Translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, [1977] 1985).
[8] Michelle Kisliuk, *Seize the Dance!: BaAka Musical Life and The Ethnography of Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1998] 2001).

are confronted with choices, struggle with others, make conflicting statements, and discuss their circumstances and desires. This approach allows me to subvert the tendency to homogenize culture groups or to represent their lived experiences as ahistorical.[9]

I was inspired by writers who blur the lines of fiction and ethnography such as Abu-Lughod, Chernoff, Fernea, and Lortat-Jacob.[10] These texts call into question what constitutes anthropological knowledge, and choose story telling as a narrative technique that allows the reader to move with individuals as they navigate the complexities of their lives more fully, because the story is not required to have critical distance. Each of these ethnographers wove those stories into what can be called "critical ethnography" by selecting the stories and revealing a situated, yet detailed picture of the lives of the people they know and seek to represent.

As I open up a space for stories to be heard, I punctuate the prose with interpretation and interjection, or pause and reflect as one does in life. This creates a shift in narrative register that mimics the experience of ethnography in which one has an experience or a conversation, but then creates a translation to interpret the various meanings attached to what was said or done. This also creates a non-linear evocation of experiences, as people weave in and out of the story, creating connections, similarities, and differences. The differences between the women and

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[9] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1977] 2007), 14.

[10] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); John Miller Chernoff, *Hustling is not Stealing: Stories of an African Bar Girl* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, *Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village* (New York: Doubleday, 1965); Bernard Lortat-Jacob, *Sardinian Chronicles* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

men provide a more nuanced, richer, picture of the actuality of lived experience in rural Dagaraland. Finally, I recognize that not all forms of knowledge production can address all people's situations in all places and times—my style was born out of the experiences I had during my fieldwork, my research methodology, and represents the located concerns of the people I work with.

Relationship between Thematic Material and Narrative Style

These writing techniques allow the broader themes of the dissertation to weave in and out of each other as well. Each vignette contains themes present in the work as a whole, but provides another analytical lens through which to view those themes. I explore notions of cultural authenticity, and tradition, asking who has access to defining and mobilizing these narratives. I investigate the racialization of gender ideologies, which includes the rigid demarcation between Western and African ways of thinking and being. I point to how concepts of authenticity and tradition are held in opposition to national gender equity policies, and how this affects the material reality of women's lives. I show how Dagara women are responding to the macro-conversations of cultural authenticity and gender equity, from which they are excluded, through musical performance, dancing, speaking, and resource building. Finally, I point to the contributions that counternarratives contribute to postcolonial theory and African musical scholarship.

Certain forms of knowledge production reify very old power structures, especially in Africa. Confining people's lives to units of analysis manufactures a distance that upholds notions of difference. Within my narrative style is the location

of sameness within difference. I found I could not organize my work according to narrow categories that create distance between me and them, or that uphold the idea that gender, race, class, education, status, resistance, community, and music are discrete, self-contained units. Because that is not how the people I know organized their lives, I chose to focus on individuals.

The chapters are a series of contrasts, in style, tone, and subject matter. I begin by introducing Rejoice, a woman whose narrative shaped many of the themes that emerge in this work. My experiences with her drew my attention to the operative nature of Dagara gender ideologies and the consequences of transgression. Following Rejoice's narrative I turn to an introduction that provides the reader with an outline of the historical, cultural, and musical contexts that inform this work as well as the theoretical foundations I am utilizing. In the second narrative chapter I introduce Georgina Waabe, a female gyil player. In this chapter I introduce several Dagara women, who provide their accounts of their experiences as female gyil players. I explore the possibilities of viewing pleasure as a resistant strategy, and in re-evaluating the valuation of public over private performance. In the third chapter I introduce Dr. Alexis Nang-beifubah, the Regional Health Director, and discuss the construction and mediation of demarcations of belonging. I ask how various individuals negotiate these boundaries, and utilizing postcolonial theory, illustrate the complex identity formations that are disregarded through such limited terms as African and Western. In the fourth chapter, I turn to a description of my relationship with Naamwin Kosagr, a Dagara man living in Fielmua. Here I explore how status is obtained among the Dagara, and how ideas about literacy and

illiteracy serve to grant authorial privilege to the class of educated elite. It was through this relationship that I learned about the political economy of sex in Dagaraland, the economic strategies of borderlanders, and how constructions of whiteness relate to status and sexuality. In the fifth chapter I analyze the 2009 Kakur Bagr Festival, the annual xylophone festival held in Fielmua. The festival is the site in which "culture" and "tradition" are on public display, and thus provides an opportunity to witness the most public version of how the Dagara present their identity. I provide information on the festival from the perspectives of the creators, those who are working for socio-economic development in the area, and created the festival as a means of stimulating the local economy and bringing national and regional attention to the specific needs of the community. I then examine the festival from the perspectives of those who do not control the public image of the Dagara culture, those who remain in Fielmua after the festivities, and what happens after everyone else leaves. Next, in the sixth and final chapter, I offer a brief description of one experience witnessing women's public displays of dancing and drinking that led me to seek out other ways in which women form groups. Following that experience, I learned about formalized women's groups in the Fielmua area. I reflect upon my experiences with one of these groups, and discuss their song repertoires. Through examining their song texts, I show how they discuss the mediation of local and transnational gender ideologies, and approach the theorization of a global feminism.

The narrative style supports the exploration of my themes by providing an opportunity to examine individual responses to cultural codes, to localized constructions of status and power, to the internalization of gender and racial

ideologies, and the hierarchies of power that constrict people's actions. Each of the individuals presented in the text has a different relationship to these structures, and to the meanings assigned to their bodies. Candy, Georgina, Fatima, Christy, Edith, Kosagr, Festus, Godfrey, Bosco, Alexis, Lambert, Faustie, and Rejoice have individually interpreted their mediation of the categories they are asked to live within. By presenting their stories, their perspectives, and their relationships to each other I am able to more fruitfully evoke the *meaning* of those power structures, as well as how individuals choose to respond to them. Even women who externally appear to experience the same social conditions, and seemingly resist in the same ways, like Candy and Georgina, do not have identical motivations, strategies of resistance, or relationships to the gendered body. I adhere to what Obioma Nnaemeka calls the project of "building on the indigenous,"[11] not only by dialoguing with culturally grounded models of understanding and representing African experiences, but through sharing focused, specific, details in people's lives from which can be gleaned new theories of resistance and empowerment. Each of the individuals in this work offers new cultural possibilities, and is actively re-writing Dagara narratives. Individuals are excluded differently and are precluded from the category of "knower" differently, based on different categories assigned to their bodies; some by gender, some by status based on age or literacy, some by class. Ultimately, many people find strategies of resistance that transgress reductive and ahistoric notions of what constitutes Dagara-ness. As they do this, they open up new

[11] Obioma Nnaemeka, "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29 no. 2 (2003): 257-385.

subject positions not restricted by narrowly defined categories, therefore tearing down the master's house that seeks to contain them.

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My decision to conduct an ethnography of the particular, everyday events of people's lives and my decision to present the research findings as a series of evocative portraits results in a text that requires additional information on how this work can be read effectively. Each vignette is presented as a narrative that highlights the voices of several individuals, and is guided by my editorial voice. Rather than present theoretical material and use ethnographic data for illustrative purposes, in this text the narrative *is* the theory. I am not explicitly distinguishing between theoretical material, informational material, and ethnographic narrative. The interweaving of those sets up a new theory about how to approach ethnography and representation. I am asking my readers to engage the details of storytelling as integral to the establishment of a theoretical perspective. Because none of the themes of this dissertation are self-contained, every story must be considered in the context of the whole. My editorial voice comments on the details and reflects upon the broader implications of specific moments, however I also ask my reader to participate in an engaged form of reading that allows the story to sing. I ask you to become familiar with individuals over the course of the work, to study their details and relationships, and to consider possible contradictions within them, within the societal codes that are operating in their lives. This process of gradually coming to understand the lives of several Dagara men and women throughout the work

provides an account of the complexity and diversity of life in rural Dagaraland. These stories are, of course, only partial; finally, I ask my reader to remember that every individual's story continued on far beyond the pages of this work.

●REJOICE●

"It's just this animal called culture."
--Rejoice

"If you provoke a rattlesnake, you must be prepared to be bitten by it."
--Gikuyu proverb

In July 2008, I became friends with a Dagara woman who I will call Rejoice.[1] I was in Fielmua in the summer of 2008 beginning my Dagara language study, and had gone to Wa for the weekend to see the regional capital and to enjoy cell phone reception, a ceiling fan, and an indoor shower. I will never forget the night I met her: I had been in the car for at least six hours, and it had broken down twice. The unpaved road from Fielmua to Wa is dusty, and full of holes. After several hours of riding in the car with open windows I was covered in a fine red dust. Prosper, Adam, and I had been invited to have dinner with several of Prosper's friends. We arrived at their upscale home, and were offered water and Star beer. Family members moved in and out of the living room, Prosper joked with the young girls, and we were offered pictures to look at while we waited for dinner. I remember the entire scene as though it were slow replay in a movie--sitting on the sofa in the comfortable and finely decorated living room, I turned to see her walk in the door. Rejoice and her husband John had arrived, and I fell in love. I had met John several times before; he had driven me to Fielmua from Accra on my first visit to the Upper West the year before. I was

[1] I have changed all of the names in this chapter in order to respect the privacy of the individuals involved.

mesmerized by Rejoice's beauty and warmth; she was self-assured and articulate, a well-put together woman. Ghanaian women are meticulous with their appearance—taking great care with their hair styling and clothing. I specifically remember that she had painted her toe nails hot pink, and I looked down at my unpolished nails in embarrassment. Her striking beauty and confidence drew a sharp contrast to my own physical appearance. I was suddenly intensely aware of how I must have looked—tired and dirty in an overly worn black tank top and green cargo pants.

Rejoice was the first Dagara woman who taught me a lot about what it means to be a Dagara woman. She was very open with me about her personal life, she discussed gender ideologies with me, and she was instrumental in my developing a nuanced vision of Dagara women. I had visited Fielmua the summer before, but only briefly, and I hadn't developed any close friendships with Dagara women. To this day, every time I see her I fall back in love. She has an incredible sense of style, and an undeniably charming personality.

After dinner, the group sat around the living room drinking and talking about the Dagara music scene. Rejoice was sitting next to me on the couch, and we began a side conversation about my purposes for being in Ghana. I told her about the research project I was formulating and my particular interest in Dagara women's traditions. I had begun my research on Dagara music several years earlier, but had become more drawn to Dagara female musical experiences. The primary musical instrument of the Dagara is the *gyil*, a xylophone performed primarily by men. Through my studies I learned that women also play the gyil, but not as frequently as not typically in public. I was staying in Fielmua that summer to begin to learn the

Dagara language and to explore gender constructions in the community. Telling Rejoice about my work, I conveyed some of my current understandings of how gyil performance becomes gendered, and the complexities undertaking a research agenda with competing narratives:

Prosper and I were spending almost everyday together at this point, and we frequently engaged in debates about gender and music. These conversations took a variety of forms and tones: sometimes he would tell me about female gyil players he knew, or would share the local terminology for "strong women" or a "woman who transcends her social position." Sometimes, rather than being instructional, our conversations would turn into arguments, debates about social roles and responsibilities. He would insist that women are not enculturated not to play the instrument, but that they "just don't want to." I would tell him what I saw: the subtle ways that girls and boys come to know how to *be* in the world. We frequently disagreed, but I did not sense that the friendship was strained; we enjoy each other's company and the dialogue, even though he jokingly tells me, "*Fu yelle kpɛmɛnna"* (literally translated as "your ways are strong," or you are stubborn).

Often, Prosper's insistence on one position would be countered by Helena, his niece, and my long-time friend. On one particular instance, occurring just before the trip to Wa, Prosper and I were at his family home in Hiineteng, a village outside of Fielmua, sitting on the sofa finishing our language lesson, when we returned to a previous conversation about why none of the girls in the household could play the gyil. Prosper took the position that if they had the drive or the talent, they would naturally approach the instrument, that the choice was personal and nothing more.

Understanding that the girls might not have been directly instructed not to play the instrument, but wanting more details about how Dagara girls experience their social environment, I continued to press in asking questions. Perhaps my approach of directly asking him to explain women's experiences was flawed. In an indication that the conversation was over, he left the room. Helena, who had been adjusting her hair in the mirror turned and smiled at me. Helena does not play the gyil, but is an excellent dancer, the leader in Prosper's folkloric group. I listened to her tell me a story that her mother told her.

She said, "Okay, so you know they don't say this much anymore, but they said it to my mother. They tell you that if you are a girl, and you want to play the gyil, you won't be able to have babies." I had heard this recollection before from other people, as a myth about why women don't play on the gyil. I asked her if she believed it to be true, or if her mother had believed it to be true. She said, "It's not true. But you know, if you go to play the thing they won't teach you. So you should better go and be a dancer. My mother, she is the best dancer. When she dances *bine*,[2] oh, you will stop and watch her. I told her one day I will beat her, and she told me that if I challenge her at bine and beat her that she will be happy."

Through this brief "scene" multiple questions emerged for me. When Prosper and I were having a conversation about gender that Helena overheard, why did she only speak when Prosper left the room? What is the context against which and around which she is speaking? Would she have been heard differently if she spoke directly to him? Why is it that I'm the one who hears both sides? This moment with

[2] A Dagara social dance.

Helena was instrumental in showing me a number of things about the trajectory that my project would take. We tailor what we say to the context we are speaking into, and the context has to be as closely evaluated as the information. In this case, Helena might have felt like what she had to share would not have been received the same way if she had interjected her story into the conversation I was having with Prosper. This scene also illustrated for me that approach to asking direct questions about gender and power relationships would yield conflicting narratives. Each individual's perception of the gendered nature of the instrument is based on the details of life experience and personal history. I would have to allow the details to emerge in order to untangle the increasingly complicated web surrounding the gendering of the gyil.

Perhaps hearing me share my thoughts with Rejoice, Prosper posed the question to the larger group: why were there not more female gyil players? I listened carefully as Rejoice spoke. She said that girls[3] who want to play will not be forbidden, but the social pressure is subtle, and they will be teased for being like a boy. "Perhaps they will find it difficult to get a husband," she said. Rejoice further articulated, "they will get the most resistance from other women, for being different."

The topic of conversation gradually shifted from female gyil players to Dagara gender ideology more broadly. If I asserted an opinion about my perception of gender discrepancies one of the men would assert that, "You only think that way because of your culture." I was taken aback by this perspective because it implies

[3] Dagara people learn to play the gyil as children, not as adults.

that my observations are not only shaped by my background and my nationality, but that I was performing a "Western" reading of their cultural practices. As I continued my fieldwork, I noticed that people would sometimes mobilize homogenized versions of cultural authenticity with the result of denying agency and subjectivity to the people being spoken about. In this case, I felt that I was being denied subjectivity by being placed alongside a perception of how Westerners read and react to African cultures. Rather than being Sidra, the person, who has opinions and nuanced perspectives on life, I was Sidra, an amalgamation of stereotypes about Western women.

This reaction speaks to a history of colonialism and the African state, and also is informed by popular tropes of Western women. Historically, the processes of colonialism in Africa denigrated local cultural models, and created a system of valuation that not only privileged Western ideology but filtered all local knowledge and practice through the lens of Western perception. I internalized the statement that "you only think that way because of your culture" as a mechanism to refuse any perceived regulation by a Westerner. This theme would return to me many times over the course of my fieldwork, and would become an organizing principle of my experiences in Fielmua. That night in Wa, it was not clear to me exactly what the perception of Western women was, only that I fit inside of it. I would later learn more about the assumptions that many people made about Western-ness and whiteness, the motivation for creating these boundaries, and the effect they have on Dagara women.

A particularly memorable and educational aspect of this group conversation emerged for me as Rejoice explained the gendered aspects of familial conflict management among the Dagara. She explained to me that because the Dagara practice an extended family system, when there is a problem between a husband and his wife, it is actually a matter for the whole family. Continuing, she said that if a woman is angry with her husband, all she has to do is go to his mother, who will straighten out the problem. In this way, the family functions together to solve problems, and resolve marital disputes. In the same vein, a woman can go to her father's brothers if she is having a serious problem with her husband, and the men in her father's house will negotiate with the husband to solve the dispute. Rejoice's explanation was instructive in elucidating Dagara familial power structures, and how women obtain power by working within those structures.

That evening in Wa was particularly memorable for me because several moments sparked what would become the foundation of this project. Rejoice's illustration of the Dagara way of negotiating power within the family pointed to a localized model of gender dynamics. I also learned about the perceptions of Western feminism, and how my place within my project would both open doors and close them.

In the coming days, however, what I saw and what I heard forced a sharp contrast to the balanced explanation I was offered that night in Wa. The next week, after I had returned to Fielmua, I was surprised to see Rejoice in my house, because I was unaware that one of my housemates was Rejoice's mother. She was in Fielmua to attend a funeral; her husband could not make it, so she came alone. Her mother

had been ill, and Rejoice wanted to make sure she was alright, and visit with her. In the evening, Rejoice, myself, and another female friend went out to a local bar to drink and socialize. I will never forget that night because Rejoice told me a lot about Dagara marriage structure, gender ideologies, and the ways of negotiating problems between men and women. My friend Fatima who joined us, was, at the time, struggling because she wanted to get pregnant, but she also wanted to return to school. Her husband's family was becoming annoyed that she had not been able to give birth, and she was getting worried that he would either divorce her or marry a second wife. Rejoice, a nurse, instructed Fatima on what she should do, and the best ways to insure pregnancy and ultimately secure her position as a wife, which will have the result of enabling her to pursue her own career. Rejoice told Fatima and me that John was not faithful to her; she knew that he had many girlfriends. I was surprised, based on what she had said in Wa. I asked why she didn't talk to his mother, or to her father's brothers as she had described to me as the customary way of resolving such problems. She told us that there was nothing her family could do; in Dagara culture men, even men who do not practice polygamy can go out and have as many girlfriends as they want. That evening she told Fatima and I all the ways she had to catch him, and stories about going to confront girlfriends, and having girlfriends call the house. We gossiped for hours, the three of us sharing stories about men, and about other women.

This conversation is emblematic of women's ways of sharing information and resource building. Through the gossip of the night, Fatima was given several useful techniques that would improve her social situation, and I learned a lot about how

women negotiate power within their relationships. Over time I came to recognize these informal gossip sessions between women as important resources for gaining information and strategizing. During my extended stay in Fielmua, Fatima spent nearly every morning in my room sharing the information she had heard at the clinic, the market, and the water pump.

I learned so much that night, and so thoroughly enjoyed the company of the women that I asked Rejoice to stay one more night in Fielmua. She agreed, and after the funeral the next day, she stayed and we spent more time together. The morning she was to leave, I woke up, went outside and found Rejoice on the phone with her husband, who was furious. I didn't understand the problem at the time, but she explained to me that in Dagara culture, when a woman marries, she marries into her husband's home. Among all that this entails it means that when she travels she must go and stay with her husband's family. That she went to her mother's house was a violation of "traditional" cultural practices, and was a red flag of another sort. Among the Dagara, women are not permitted to have sex outside of their marriage. If they do, or if they engage in any type of sexual contact with a man who is not their husband, they must confess right away. If they do not confess, according to traditional belief systems, they will die if they enter the man's home, if they offer him food or water, or if they sleep with their husband. To Rejoice's husband, that she went to her mother instead of to his family home was an indication that she had been unfaithful.

The next week, Prosper, Helena, and I were on our way back to Accra. We stopped over in Wa, and I spoke with Rejoice on the phone; she told me that she had

been physically beaten by her husband. I was very upset, and we all went to her house. When I saw her sitting inside, bruised, I was overwhelmed with the situation and cried openly. The chain of events had visibly rattled me. As she and I discussed what had happened, she said to me, "It's just this animal called culture." Her statements had a lasting impact on me, and continue to shape my understanding of the ways that Dagara women internalize and react to cultural codes that are inscribed on their bodies.

As we were leaving, Prosper hugged Rejoice and told her that she did not deserve what had happened to her. When we got in the car, Helena began to make fun of me for getting so upset, and especially for crying. I was angry; of course I was upset. Why wasn't she upset? She said, "If you know that if you act this way that your husband will beat you, don't act that way." At the time I was annoyed by what Helena said; it seemed to be implying that you should do what your husband tells you to do, regardless of what you think or want to do. Looking back, however, and knowing more about Dagara women and how they interact with men, what Helena was trying to tell me is clearer. Helena was actually agreeing with what Rejoice had just told me: culture is an animal. You have to know the nature of the animal, and act accordingly. Both women saw the cultural parameters that they operate within. Thinking back on the entire episode, I wonder how much Prosper's reaction was shaped by my presence as well. Prosper also understands the reasons why Rejoice was physically beaten; whether or not he personally disagrees with this is irrelevant, but he knew that he could not tell her that she deserved it in front of me.

At that moment, I was the only one who didn't have a clear picture of all the elements at play.

This is a story in which I came to realize the disjuncture between what is said and what is done, and came to learn the positions on gender relations of several of my friends. Throughout the narrative, all of the women spoke differently, both in terms of the language they used, the style of speaking, and what they said, depending on the context, and the audience. It is also a story in which my presence had a tangible effect on my friend Rejoice's life, and I came to understand how the structure of Dagara society materializes in prescribed actions, as well as the consequences for ignoring one's social responsibilities. I came to see more clearly the how the Dagara understand gender, how it operates in people's lives, and how they speak about it, only through a series of events that resulted in physical and emotional violence between Rejoice and her husband.

As Rejoice and I continued to develop our friendship, and over the significant amount of time we spent together during my field research conducted from July 2009 to July 2010, this narrative also developed, and revealed layers of complexity that include the husband's perception of my "outsiderness" as threatening to Dagara cultural values. Rejoice and I would sit and talk about it, how John was convinced that my outsiderness would influence Rejoice's behavior. In what ways precisely, we were never sure. By the time I had returned to Ghana in 2009, John and Rejoice had moved to Accra, and I was going to live in Fielmua. Rejoice remained a good friend, but there were several moments in which John forbid her to see me. She once told me that he said about me, "how can she study a culture that she doesn't believe in?"

The idea that culture is something that can be believed in, as though it were static or ahistoric is far from the lived experiences of culture. I was there as a learner, I certainly never advocated for a revolution, or for a radical shift in gender ideologies. It does not matter, however, because I was viewed skeptically through the rhetoric about white women and Westerners. Both Rejoice and I were reduced to the cultural codes that people mapped upon us, and we both sat and talked about it, aware that people were only seeing us through ideas about our bodies, which had nothing to do with us as individuals.

When I experienced the kind of friction created by people's assumption that my whiteness or my Western-ness defined my belief system, I realized that much of this is dependent on a reaction against wanting to be defined against the standard of Western-ness. Just as I wanted to be seen as an individual, Dagara men and women did not want to be defined as deviations from the superior Western perspective. That I had no intention of viewing Dagara culture this way would only be made apparent through time, and through building relationships with Dagara individuals. Some people would never see me as more than an outsider, and Rejoice's husband, for example, would never be able to not see me as threatening.

Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí writes that Western discourse about African women has written gender into cultures which did not traditionally rely upon differences between men and women.[4] Michelle Kisliuk, in her work among the BaAka people of the Central African Republic experiences that the ethnographer can similarly "write

[4] Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, The Invention of Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

gender" into culture by controlling the frame of the project.[5] Kisliuk observes that her presence might have heightened men's envy and thus bad behavior at women's events because they were jealous of "ethnographic attention."[6] Similarly, my presence, and my research agenda raised questions of gender to the forefront of attention, where they might not otherwise have been. This is does imply that I "altered" the course of events, but that my presence might have caused certain individuals to adhere to more rigid boundaries of insider-ness in order to counterbalance my perceived "outsiderness."

After I had returned to the Unites States, I got a phone call from Prosper. He and I were talking about some of the recent events that had taken place between Rejoice and John. Prosper said, "You know, here, women have to be subordinate to the men. And Rejoice just can't submit." As I reflect upon everything I learned from Rejoice I realize that this story is not emblematic of relationships between Dagara people; John and Rejoice are individuals. I *do* think that what Prosper said makes a point about the dominant tropes of Dagara gender ideologies. Just as Rejoice indicated that she knew the structures that she moved within, Prosper saw her as someone who would not capitulate. Her refusal to "submit" to culture, was, according to him, leading her into troubling situations.

Rejoice's comment about her participation in "the animal called culture" frames the questions that I raise throughout this work. First, how are narratives of tradition, culture, and authenticity mobilized as regulatory tactics to control

[5] Michelle Kisliuk, Seize the Dance!: BaAka Musical Life and the Ethnography of Performance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1998] 2001).
[6] Ibid.

women's bodies? Secondly, how do notions of ethnicity and culture become racialized in order to demarcate boundaries of belonging? Third, how are these concepts of tradition and cultural authenticity being held in opposition to Ghana's national policies of gender equity and gender mainstreaming? Fourth, how do Dagara women's respond to these macro-conversations through musical performance, dancing, language, and resource building, and how can those actions be read as resistant strategies? I ask finally, what contributions Dagara women's narratives make to postcolonial feminist theory and African musical scholarship.

Rejoice's comment that culture is an animal resembles Geertz's assertion that "Man is an animal suspended in webs of signification he himself has spun."[7] Her metaphor of the animal is apt; culture is living, moving, and shifting; it is only the *application* of culture, mobilized by people towards certain ends that allow it to become reified. She also illustrates an important point, which has been discussed extensively in postcolonial and African feminist literature[8]—African women are frequently portrayed in both popular and academic discourse as victims of universal systems of oppression, as powerless, and as unable to recognize the structures they operate within. To the contrary, Rejoice is one example of a woman who has a clear

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[7] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[8] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Obioma Nnaemeka, "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29 no.2 (2003): 257-385; Ibid., ed. *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2005); Ibid., ed. *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998).

vision of the ideological structures she is asked to participate in. Her words are particularly resonant because they capture one instance of how the rhetoric surrounding tradition and culture is not neutral, not everyone has equal opportunity to mobilize these concepts for their benefit, and there is power at stake.

"Until lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter" –Igbo proverb, Nigeria.

3.

The technology of silence
The rituals, etiquette

the blurring of terms
silence not absence

of words or music or even
raw sounds

Silence can be a plan
rigorously executed

the blueprint to a life

It is a presence
it has a history a form

Do not confuse it
With any kind of absence[1]

[1] From Adrienne Rich, "Cartographies of Silence," in *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 17.

For me, as I re-read Suzanne Cusick's "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort not to Think Straight,"[2] and I consider her moving, beautifully intimate writing, the way she finds the most intimate parts of herself within her love for music, and searches for the relationship between her erotic self, her identity, her professional life, and her deep aliveness in music, I think about my own intersections. Which part of me is alive in my writing, which deep and private moments emerge in this ethnographic account? Cusick asks, how can we define so narrowly aspects of who we are, how we experience our bodies and our erotic pleasures, which pleasures are not erotic? Does music not evoke the senses, the sensual pleasures of listening and movement? She illustrates the connections between power and the erotic, demonstrating the political dimensions of loving and being loved. In 1980 Adrienne Rich wrote about the "lesbian continuum," a place where all women must seek empowerment through their connections to other women.[3] In this work, she highlights relationships between women as a political space, one which resists definition through a patriarchal lens. This dissertation is, in a way, a merging of my relationship with these two women thinkers, two lesbian thinkers and artists, for whom the erotic and the political are inseparable.

Cusick describes her early memories of music as "a music which seemed palpable, shining, like a silver air, a music through which one could pass out of the

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[2] Suzanne G. Cusick, "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort not to Think Straight," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, eds. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, [1994] 2006), 67-83.

[3] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5 no. 4 (Summer 1980): 631-660.

bewildering world and into reality."[4] My memories of fieldwork, too, are alive with sensations, smells and tastes and sounds. Those moments of music making and dancing and cooking with women. Memories of sitting and gossiping and watching women. The memories like the experiences are deeply infused with a connection to women. Those connections are not always sexual, although they are of the body. This dissertation is a reflection upon the way Dagara women speak to each other, dance with each other, refer to their mothers and daughters, and establish relationships, friends and rivals, eat together, bathe together, cook together, and make music together. The ways that their bodies live, the ways that they experience their bodies, the ways that their bodies essay critiques of oppressive systems, and are restricted through those very bodies, is the heart of this work. Those intimacies between women are of the body, as much as they are of the intellect and the emotion.

This dissertation is an attempt to weave women's voices together. Not only Dagara women's voices, but my own, the voices of scholars and poets, artists and revolutionaries from Africa and the West. It is an attempt to have women speaking to each other, sometimes through words, sometimes through movements, songs, or instrumental performance. The stories contained in this dissertation are fragmented, remembered, interpreted, and ongoing. They are bits and pieces of moments, the bricolage of life. I have attempted to weave them together, moving in

[4] Suzanne G. Cusick, "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort not to Think Straight," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, eds. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, [1994] 2006), 69.

and out of each other, speaking to each other, wrapping themselves around each other and through each other.

In this work, as in life, gender is not the only category that restricts people, nor is it the only social category that people organize around. Structures of class, race, and ethnicity intersect meaningfully within the life experiences of Dagara men and women. Dagara men are also restricted by categories that have been assigned to their bodies. Social class and educational status operate to authorize some voices while de-legitimizing others. My body, too, was assigned meanings and contained messages. And I must own and account for the various ways that my social positions effected my relationships and opportunities, the ways that people spoke to me and what they said.

This work is about the ways Dagara women act and are prevented from acting, they ways they speak and how they are silenced. I ask who is listening to them and who is not. What are their current desires, goals, and needs, and how are they working towards them? How are their actions racialized, gendered, sexualized, and contained within concepts of ethnicity and authenticity? In what ways and for what purposes do people construct ideological boundaries around insider and outsider, African and Western, black and white, male and female? How do these boundaries both confirm identity and limit movement? By asking these questions I intend to reveal how Dagara women define themselves both relationally and

individually, and how they demonstrate through their bodies and voices that, as Adrienne Rich wrote, silence is not the same as absence.[5]

The Dagara People

The Dagara people live in the Upper West Region in Ghana, as well as in neighboring Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, and are known by several names. They are frequently referred to as Dagaaba (also Dagaba). Also frequently found are the terms Dagarti or Dagati, and LoDagaa.[6] The Dagara people can be further subdivided into three smaller groups, those from the North, around Nandom, those in the central area of Dagaraland, around Jirapa, and those in the Southern area of Dagaraland. The northernmost Dagara people are known as Dagara, as is their language, the Southern Dagara people are known as Birifor[7], their dialect is known by the same name, the central Dagara are called Dagaaba (sing. Dagao) and the dialect they speak is Dagaare. In the scholarly literature as well as in common practice, the terms Dagara and Dagaaba are most frequently used interchangeably; Lentz reveals the local contestations and tensions surrounding the debate over

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[5] Adrienne Rich, "Cartographies of Silence," in *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 16-20.

[6] Sebastian K. Bemile, "Promotion of Ghanaian Languages and its Impact on National Unity: the Dagara Language Case," in Ethnicity in Ghana: The Limits of Invention, ed. Carola Lentz and Paul Nugent (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 204-225; Jack Goody, Death Property and the Ancestors: A Study of the Mortuary Customs of the LoDagaa of West Africa (London: Tavistock Publications, 1962); Ibid., The Myth of the Bagr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); Carola Lentz, Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Atta Annan Mensah, "Gyil: The Dagara-Lobi Xylophone," Journal of African Studies 9 no. 3 (Fall 1982): 139-154.

[7] The Birifor people are culturally related to the Lobi people, who live West of the Black Volta in the Ivory Coast. Their xylophone performance styles and repertoire are also similar, however they are linguistically unrelated. The scholarly literature reflects a continuing conflation of these two groups often referred to as Lobi-Birifor. Additionally, because of colonial applications of the term Lobi to the Birifor people, one frequently encounters in common practice Birifor people referred to as Lobi or Dagarti-Lobi. According to Lentz, the term Lobi is a colonial construction, and a pejorative used to indicate the inferiority of the group (2006).

which term is actually correct, which is to be used, and if the two groups comprise one ethnic group.[8] In any case, all of these dialects are distinct yet mutually intelligible, even across the political borders of Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire. I use the term Dagara throughout this work, as the people I lived and worked with are among the northernmost Dagara, and although they sometimes refer to themselves as Dagaaba, they primarily identify as Dagara.

The ethnic groups in closest geographic proximity to the Dagara are the Sissala, and the Wala. The Wala occupy the regional capital of Wa, and are culturally distinct from the Sissala and Dagara groups. Their dialect, Wali, is related to other Dagara dialects. The Sissala occupy the region just to the East of the Northern Dagara, but maintain land rights in several "Dagara villages." Lentz points out that disputes over property rights in this area between the Sissala and Dagara are important for several reasons, not the least of which is social belonging and an assertion of cultural insiderness.[9] Although the Sissala are the closest in physical proximity to the Dagara, they are linguistically unrelated. These groups do not exist in complete separation from each other; neighboring villages and towns may belong to any of these groups. The border town in which I conducted the majority of my field research, Fielmua,[10] is Sissala land that has been occupied by Dagara farmers. The towns immediately surrounding Fielmua town and its constellation of villages are Sissala. The political district that Fielmua belongs to is Sissala West.

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[8] Carola Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).
[9] Carola Lentz, "'This is Ghanaian Territory!': Land Conflicts on a West African Border," *American Ethnologist* 30 no. 2 (May 2003): 273-289.
[10] Also spelled Fielmon and Fielmuo.

Fielmua is a small town located on the northwestern border to Burkina Faso in Ghana's Upper West Region. Although it is Sissala land, it is occupied primarily by Dagara individuals, although many Sissala, Mossi, and Wala people live there as well. The word Fielmua, itself is Sissala, meaning, "rest small." The primary language spoke in Fielmua is Dagara, however many individuals speak Sissala, Wala, Mooré, or Twi. Fielmua lies along the Hamile-Tumu road,[11] with Hamile to the northwest and Tumu to the southeast. Along the main road of the town, shown in Figure 1, are various shops, businesses, and bars, the daily market, and people's homes. Towards Hamile, on the outskirts of town, lies the Catholic Church Parish. To the west, towards Tumu, in the center of town is the mosque. The three major religions being practiced in Fielmua are Catholicism, Islam, and the Dagara religion known as *bagr.*

[11] My friend Fatima enjoyed joking that Fielmua is a "one-way town." The double meaning is that because it is a small town everyone knows your business, and deviations from the standard are usually met with disdain, and there is literally one unpaved road that runs through the town. People often spend large portions of the day sitting outside in shop verandas and under shaded trees watching people pass back and forth. People who want their comings and goings not to be the business of the whole town usually take back paths. Going somewhere without everyone knowing where you are is nearly impossible.

Figure 1: Three women walking west into the center of Fielmua town

The town contains several boreholes which people use to fetch water for bathing, cooking, drinking, and washing. In addition to these water pumps, some people fetch water from the river, pictured in Figure 3. Fielmua has both a daily market, located in the center of town, and a large outdoor market place, which houses the town's weekly market. The Dagara operate on both a seven-day civic calendar and a six-day market calendar. Every six days the market returns to Fielmua, and then rotates between other nearby towns. Market day is an important day in the calendar, and people know and frequently identify the day by whose market day it is.

Fielmua area consists of the town itself and a constellation of surrounding villages. The majority of people live in the villages in family housing structures,

shown in Figure 2, although some people live in the town proper. There are also family houses in the town itself. Most of the people who live in the town itself are from other places, and have moved into town for work.

Figure 2: Dagara family housing structure in Fielmua area.

Figure 3: Looking across the river from Fielmua town.

The Gyil

The musical lives of the Dagara people revolve primarily around an 18-key xylophone, known as the *gyil.* Gyile (plural) are most frequently played in pairs, accompanied by a large calabash drum covered with a lizard skinhead, known as the *kuɔr* (see Figure 4). The two gyile and the kuɔr comprise the most commonly heard gyil ensemble. On some occasions, the Dagara also use a smaller, 14-key xylophone called *lo-gyil*. Gyile are made from the strong red wood of the Ligaa tree.[12] The bars of gyile are tied together and suspended over a wooden frame, which is tied together by cowhide. Hollowed calabash gourds act as resonators, suspended

[12] Mitchel Strumpf, Ghanaian Xylophone Studies, (Legon: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1970), 2.

beneath the bars of the gyil. The size of the gourds corresponds to the size of the bars, with the largest gourd beneath the largest and lowest pitched bar of the gyil (see Figure 5). The gourds provide the characteristic Dagara musical aesthetic, the buzzed timbre. This buzzing sound is created by cutting several holes in the largest part of each of the gourds and covering the holes with a thin white membrane made from spider egg-casings, pictured in Figure 6. The resultant buzzing sound is created when the bars of the gyil are struck and air enters the gourd, rattling the egg casing.

Figure 4: Kuɔr accompanying gyile.

Figure 5: Low end of a gyil.

Figure 6: Spider egg-casing on the wall of a house.

Dagara gyil music is performed at a wide range of events including religious ceremonies, weddings, funerals, recreationally, at public ceremonies such as the opening of a health clinic, and at annual xylophone competitions. Solo artists record and sell albums as well as perform live concerts. Gyile are played with wooden mallets, covered on one end with rubber. The player sits upon a low stool and places their hands between their open knees (see Figure 7). Gyil music is divided by several genres: *Lobri* is performed on the lo-gyil (the smaller, 14-keyed gyil) to announce the death of a community member, *bagr bine* is music performed in the indigenous Dagara religious practices of *bagr. Bine* is funeral music, although it is also performed recreationally at social gatherings. *Bewaa* is a more recent recreational genre, developed in the 1950s. Both bine and bewaa are performed at the regional festivals held during the fall and winter seasons in Dagaraland. There

are currently three main festivals in this area: *Kob-bine*, held in Lawra, *Kakube*, held in Nandom, and Fielmua's *Kakur Bagr*.[13] During these festivals groups compete in categories by genre. Bewaa groups are usually comprised of youth organizations, although some towns maintain adult bewaa groups. Bewaa groups include both men and women, while bine performances are divided by gender. During recreational gatherings that include bine performances, men and women will frequently dance together, although not in the context of funerals or festival competitions.

Bewaa is characterized by two musically and choreographically contrasting sections. During the first section, the *gyilembwere*[14] plays the melody on the gyil while embellishing the basic melody and improvising. This melody closely resembles the sung text of a piece, although the performer often improvises in such a way that the core melody is less pronounced. During this section the dancers run around the gyil ensemble in a circle. During stylized and folkloric performances this section is often embellished by dancers wearing metal jingles (*kyiima*) strapped to their legs and marking the dance beat with small metal castanets (*nupura,* singular, *nupuri*, plural) in their right hand (notice in Figure 7 the metal jingles strapped to the performers' legs). Figure 8 shows the nupuri in the performers' hands. The dancers will frequently sing the song text during this section as well. In the second section of a bewaa piece, the gyil-mwiɛre plays a melodic ostinato, during which the dancers take turns performing feats of athleticism and creativity, usually in male/female pairs. There are many stylistic variations available to performers.

[13] I recently learned of two new festivals in this area, one in Lambussie and one in Jirapa.
[14] Xylophonist.

Bine dancing is performed in lines, although at some social gatherings men and women will dance in a circle around the gyile. During funerals and festival competitions, men and women dance separately and maintain several different styles of bine dancing. Male dancing is often punctuated by leaping into the air, and kicking the ground, producing clouds of dust. Older men sometimes raise umbrellas or canes into the air. During bine women do not leap or kick, but alternate hopping steps, shuffling steps, and knee raising. Much of the movement in women's bine is located in the upper body, which while remaining flat, raises and lowers towards the knees.

Gyil performance and dancing are not formally taught, but are learned through enculturation. Very few community members can play gyil well enough to do so publically, however gyile are integral to life cycle events and social cohesion. Funerals, for example, would not be considered efficacious without the gyile to guide the process of mourning. Similarly, social gatherings are marked by musical performance and dancing; gyil performance offers an opportunity for social dancing. Those who are able to play well are accorded high levels of respect in the community. Professional gyil players are extremely rare; even recording artists supplement their income through other means. At funerals gyil players are paid to perform, although the amount is not enough to be considered a living wage. It is common for certain families to produce talented gyil players. Often if a man is a gyilembwere, his children will all play the instrument. There is a concept of being "born with the gyil," which indicates a person's natural ability to play extremely well, and to be connected to the instrument in a way that is beyond most other

people. If someone is born with the gyil, they will begin playing when they are young children.

Bine and Bewaa are performed by two musicians on the gyil, one of whom acts as an accompanist. These two players can either perform on two gyile or on opposite sides of one. The accompanist plays a rhythmic ostinato on the low bars of the gyil with the wooden ends of the gyil mallets. This ostinato, *kpagru,* is a timeline reference for the xylophone player and the dancers. In bewaa, the kpagru can be played with one hand if the accompanist is also playing a supporting line on the low end of the gyil. Alternatively, the performer may play the kpagru with both hands; additionally the kpagru can be complicated through rhythmic embellishment. Bewaa and bine are both anchored by this timeline, although the rhythms are not uniform. In addition to the polyrhythmic texture created by the gyil and the kpagru, the gyil-mwiɛre often wears metal bells around their wrist to further contribute to the dense, overlapping texture. The kuɔr completes the ensemble providing a rhythmic accompaniment. Figure 9 shows the kpagru being played on the low end of the gyil.

Figure 7: Bewaa dancers at the Kob-bine festival in Lawra. October 2009.

Figure 8: Bewaa dancer with small metal castanets (nupuri).

Figure 9: Kpagru performed on gyil during bine at a funeral.

During my fieldwork I met and worked with several female gyil players. Only one of the women I knew performed publically, the others perform in the context of private homes and predominantly in the presence of other women. My own relationship with the instrument became relevant during the course of my fieldwork in Fielmua. I began playing the gyil in 2005 while conducting research for my Master's thesis. During previous trips to Fielmua in 2007 and 2008 I often played gyil in the presence of men and women both publically and in the domestic sphere. During an extended stay in Fielmua from 2009-2010, as my awareness of operative Dagara gender ideologies was heightened, I became increasingly sensitive to demarcating boundaries between myself and the Dagara women I know. Although I was not restricted from public gyil performance, I felt as though I was pronouncing the differences based on my race and nationality. Because I was not regulated by Dagara gender ideologies, I was permitted to enter into areas and to behave in ways

that would be considered inappropriate for Dagara women. Although some Dagara women do perform publically on the gyil, since most of the women I knew did not, I decided to adhere to their behavioral patterns. When I was with Candida, who performs publically, I felt comfortable doing the same; however Georgina's decision to play in the domestic sphere guided my choice to also only play in the contexts that made sense to her. In doing so I hoped to better understand the performance sensibilities of each woman, and to avoid marking myself as different and invulnerable to gendered regulation. The majority of my performance in Fielmua took place with Georgina in her brother's home and in the company of the female members of the household. Georgina's valuation of this private space led me to an awareness of new contexts for playing gyil and dancing and the creation of female-centric performances.

Studies of Music in Ghana

Ghanaian music scholarship is arguably one of the most well developed areas of Africanist ethnomusicology. Additionally, Ghanaian musics have perhaps the widest presence in worldwide distribution of "traditional" music forms in universities and cultural troupes, in no small part due to the relationships formed between ethnomusicologists, universities, and Ghanaian musicians. Although there has been an extensive amount of work performed in Ghana, there has been relatively little critical theorization of Ghanaian music as it operates within larger systems of politics, economics, education, or the media. Furthermore, studies of Ghanaian music have been limited geographically and confined to a few ethnic groups. It is now necessary for Ghanaian music scholars to reflect upon the areas of

absence in the literature and to expand geographic and theoretical frameworks, as well as methodological and narrative approaches, in order to deepen the already substantial body of literature on Ghanaian music.

Studies of Ghanaian music reach back to the early works of Ward[15] and Hornbostel[16] that were primarily concerned with descriptions and comparisons. Both Ward and Hornbostel attempted to determine the musical principles that were most characteristic of Ghanaian music, and to understand the differences in musical production between Ghanaians and Europeans. For example, Ward determined that polymeter and polyrhythm were the most distinguishable features of "music in the Gold Coast," and Hornbostel developed the concept of *motor sense,* writing that Africans proceed musically from feeling, Europeans from hearing. It is apparent even from the earliest of works in Ghana, that the naming of musical features and the separation of African musical traits from European music traits founded the production of difference that still characterizes much Ghanaian music scholarship.[17]

A.M. Jones's pioneering study among the Ewe in Ghana resulted in the two-volume collection, *Studies in African Music.*[18] Jones's methodological and theoretical approaches were quite different than preceding works; he based his study on ethnomusicological fieldwork, interviewing musicians, and transcribing music. He also determined that music was best understood within a cultural context, and provided social contextualization for his transcriptions. His transcriptions, although

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[15] W.E. Ward, "Music in the Gold Coast," *Gold Coast Review* 3 (1927): 199-223.
[16] Erich M. Von Hornbostel, "African Negro Music," *Africa* 1 (January 1928): 30-62.
[17] Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
[18] A.M. Jones, *Studies in African Music*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

extensive, are almost indecipherable. Jones did not believe that "the Africans," as he called his informants, could conceptualize or theorize their own music, and so his own theorization was necessary. Although Jones grounded his study in fieldwork, the evolutionary views of Hornbostel remained prevalent.

The work of James Koetting represents a significant departure from the preceding work. Koetting, committed to understanding indigenous musical conceptualization, valued the opinions and theorizations of his informants. In 1970, his work "Analysis and Notation of West African Drum Ensemble music" was a search for a transcription model that de-centered the Eurocentric staff notation methods previously used; he saw the application of staff notation to African music as a mapping of Western values and systems of understanding onto African musical conception, which is valuable in its own right.[19] As Kofi Agawu has pointed out, the actuality of this perception is that an emphasis on difference denies African musicians and musical systems access to the tools of modernity.[20]

J. H. Kwabena Nketia's work in Ghana represents yet another theoretical lens utilized by Ghanaian ethnomusicologists.[21] As a Ghanaian, Nketia's writing was valued for his indigenous knowledge and insider's perspectives. Previous ethnomusicological works written by Africans, such that by Francis Bebey,[22] worked against the studies by Jones and his colleagues by legitimizing the serious study of

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[19] James Koetting, "Analysis and Notation of West African Drum Ensemble Music," *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology* 1 no. 3 (1970): 116-146.
[20] Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
[21] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *African Music in Ghana,* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1963); Ibid., *The Music of Africa,* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974).
[22] Francis Bebey, *African Music: a People's Art,* Translated by Josephine Bennett (New York: Lawrence Hill, [1969] 1975).

African music. In Bebey's study, for example, he showed the depth and range of African musics by linking music with social context, emotional aspects, and intellectual processing. Nketia's writing, on the other hand, is primarily an indexical account of the vast musical traditions in Ghana.

Later ethnomusicologists such as John Miller Chernoff and David Locke followed the tradition of Koetting by seeking indigenous models of understanding. Chernoff's seminal text *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*[23] based on fieldwork performed with the Anlo-Ewe and Dagbamba peoples exemplifies Ghanaian music scholarship. Chernoff values the theorization and knowledge of his teachers, and values the process of learning in ethnomusicological scholarship. From this point forward, Ghanaian ethnomusicologists, almost uniformly would learn to perform the musics they study in great detail. Certainly, the concept of "bi-musicality"[24] was not unique to Ghanaian ethnomusicologists, however I submit that the extent to which students of Ghanaian music value "traditional" musical styles and forms has caused an asymmetrical development in the field. In a sense, the emphasis placed on learning to *play* Ghanaian music has replaced the impetus to *study* Ghanaian music in a critical manner. It is quite possible that the over-emphasis on "tradition," resulting in the canonization of Ghanaian music, stems from this initial desire to learn to perform music.

Further contributing to a highly localized lineage of knowledge production, the vast majority of studies performed in Ghana have focused on the Southern

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[23] John Miller Chernoff, African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
[24] Mantle Hood, "The Challenge of Bi-Musicality," Ethnomusicology 4 no. 2 (May 1960): 55-59.

regions of the country, specifically the Southeastern area known as the Volta Region, creating an Ewe-centric canon of ethnomusicological thought. Outside of Agawu's exploration of the Northern Ewe,[25] most studies have been conducted with the Anlo-Ewe, a group with a distinct dialect and cultural and musical practices. The music of the Anlo-Ewe has come to represent the Ewe ethnic group as a whole, as well as the entire country. As Agawu writes, this critique is necessary because there is a "disjuncture between the practice of African music and its scholarly representation."[26] The Ghanaian soundscape is vast and multi-faceted; the ethnomusicological focus on the "traditional" music of the Ewe under-complicates the multitude of musical experiences and realities in Ghana.

Studies of the Anlo-Ewe[27] have created a lineage of methodological and theoretical frames. Each of these studies relied *solely* upon male informants and teachers without an explanation for the exclusion.[28] The majority of the work conducted in Ghana has been contained not only in an isolated region that has become emblematic for the country, but also with a relatively small and repetitive group of teachers. Koetting studied with C.K. Ladzepko, as did Chernoff, who also

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[25] Kofi Agawu, African Rhythm*: A Northern Ewe Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[26] Ibid., Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions (New York: Routledge, 2003), xv.

[27] W.E. Ward, "Music in the Gold Coast," *Gold Coast Review* 3 (1927): 199-223; Erich M. Von Hornbostel, "African Negro Music," *Africa* 1 (January 1928): 30-62; A.M. Jones, *Studies in African Music,* 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); James Koetting, "Analysis and Notation of West African Drum Ensemble Music," *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology* 1 no. 3 (1970): 116-146; John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); David Locke, *Kpegisu: A War Drum of the Ewe* (Crown Point, IN: White Cliffs Media, 1992).

[28] Not only are women's voices excluded, each of these studies fails to explore any range of experience outside of the male heterosexual lens. Rather than acknowledge the selection of male consultants, the strategy is implicit, thus normalizing the heterosexual, male-dominated matrix. Other categories of difference are also erased such as class and social status.

worked with Alhaji Ibrahim Abdulai and Gideon Folie Alorwoyie, as did Locke. Chernoff and Locke also both performed studies of Dagbamba music culture in the Northern Region of Ghana.[29] The creation of such a tightly knit group of teachers does not account for the heterogeneity of musical traditions and experiences in Ghana. The resulting representation of Ghanaian music abroad is reflective of a narrow perspective and a dramatic canonization of musics and peoples. Agawu asks, "What role has ethnomusicology played in promoting as well as inhibiting the development of African music?"[30] I assert that the current isolation of a selected few teachers and culture groups in the literature has deeply impacted the production of music within Ghana as well as representation of Ghanaian music abroad.

I question the motivations for such a narrow focus of study. Overwhelmingly, ethnomusicologists have not addressed the social positions of the individuals that they rely on for "neutral" information. For example, the emergence of a class of educated elite in Ghana has contributed to the political and social mobilization of certain bodies of musics. A lack of political analyses has left actors who resist structures of domination or oppression through musical creation and performance with no representation. Individuals are generally represented as master musicians, and as storehouses of cultural knowledge. While this may be true, they are also participating in the intersecting positions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class. What we do not see in the literature is an examination of how these various intersections impact knowledge production.

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[29] David Locke, *Drum Damba: Talking Drum Lessons. Featuring Abubakari Lunna*, (Crown Point, IN: White Cliffs Media, 1990).

[30] Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003), xii.

Given the lengthy history of Ghanaian music scholarship, there are strikingly few studies that incorporate women's music making or gender as a category of analysis. There have been a few studies, however, which do include women's narratives.[31] Barbara Hampton examines the musical practices of Ga musicians who live on the southeastern coast of Ghana in the Greater Accra Region. Writing from a reconstructionist perspective, Hampton notes that studies of Ga musical culture have taken male experiences to represent the whole of the Ga community. She aims to reorient this framework by privileging "Ga women's interpretations of their reality."[32] She focuses on *adaawe* song poetry, a genre created and performed by women. Hampton asks in what ways "Ga women symbolically (re)construct their experience through adaawe song performances."[33] Hampton takes her methodological model from feminist ethnographers, analyzing the life histories and musical ideas of female composer-performers, as well as the song texts. She provides the life histories of three Ga adaawe performers, showing how musical performance and creation are spaces for women to assert their values, to negotiate social problems, and to communicate with each other. Through these women's stories, we realize the "socially shared idea that song has power to effect change."[34] Additionally, the musical space is a "socially available resource" that creates a

[31] James Burns, *Female Voices from an Ewe Dance-Drumming Community in Ghana: Our Music has become a Divine Spirit* (Surrey, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009); Barbara L. Hampton, "Music and Gender in Ga Society: Adaawe Song Poetry," in *African Musicology: Current Trends,* vol. II, ed. Jacqueline DjeDje (Los Angeles, California: Crossroads Press/African Studies Association, 1992), 135-149; Trevor Wiggins, "Techniques of Variation and Concepts of Musical Understanding in Northern Ghana," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 7 (1998): 117-142.

[32] Barbara L. Hampton, "Music and Gender in Ga Society: Adaawe Song Poetry," in *African Musicology: Current Trends,* vol. II, ed. Jacqueline DjeDje (Los Angeles, California: Crossroads Press/African Studies Association, 1992), 135.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 141.

mutual aid network for women to help each other respond to problems.[35] This work importantly emphasizes the need to listen to stories that are not present in the available body of ethnomusicological literature, and to focus on what women have to say about their realities and experiences. Hampton clearly shows how musical performance and musical space have socially transformative potential, which is used by women as an alternate strategy to obtain power and control in a rigidly patriarchal society. Finally, this work is instructive in how to look and listen; women's ways of talking and acting that are de-emphasized in dominant methodologies provide crucial counternarratives.

There have also been several studies of xylophone music in Ghana.[36] The primary focus of these studies has been the transcription of xylophone repertoires, and the analyses of musical processes. Within these studies, only Wiggins and Kobom mention the gendering of the gyil. They provide an account of the origin story of the instrument, which explicates the exclusion of women from performance, and note how the story has been translated into a mechanism of social control, writing, "If a woman were to play the xylophone, according to Dagaare myth, she

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Larry Dennis Godsey, "The use of the Xylophone in the Funeral ceremony of the Birifor of Northwest Ghana" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1980); Atta Annan Mensah, "Gyil: The Dagara-Lobi Xylophone," *Journal of African Studies* 9 no. 3 (Fall 1982): 139-154; Ibid., "The Polyphony of Gyil-gu, Kudzo and Awutu Sakumo," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 19 (1967): 75-79; Mary Hermaine Seavoy,"The Sissala Xylophone Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1982); Mitchel Strumpf, *Ghanaian Xylophone Studies* (Legon: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1970); Michael B. Vercelli, "Performance Practice of the Dagara-Birifor Gyil Tradition Through the Analysis of the Bewaa and Daarkpen Repertoire" (D.M.A. doc., University of Arizona, Tucson, 2006); Trevor Wiggins, "The Xylophone Tradition of North-West Ghana," in *Composing the Music of Africa: Composition, Interpretation and Realisation,* ed. Malcolm Floyd (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1999), 68-89; and Trevor Wiggins and Joseph Kobom, *Xylophone Music in Ghana* (Crown Point, IN: White Cliffs Media Company, 1992).

would become unable to bear children."[37] They further explicate how this operates to restrict women's performance writing, "There are a number of traditions associated with the xylophone. In Ghana it is played only by men."[38] My dissertation contributes to this literature by reinserting Dagara women's musical lives into the narrative.

Gender and Sexual Performativity

Dialoguing with scholars who utilize theories of gender performativity, I consider the structural parameters placed on subjects, analyze the relationships between gender and sexuality as social, cultural, and historical constructs, and examine action as the site of resistance and transgression. By doing so I interrogate how the cultural understandings of the relationships between sex, gender, sexuality, and the body are both restrictive and enabling. I argue that the performing body becomes a vehicle for social critique, even as that body is simultaneously regulated by ideological structures.

As an inherently performative phenomenon, music is especially conducive to analysis through theories of performativity. The temporal nature of musical performance, as Cusick[39] points out, is intimately connected to the body, as well as historical conceptions of the relationships between sexuality and the sexed body. Writing in a different context about representations of African music, Kofi Agawu

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[37] Trevor Wiggins and Joseph Kobom, *Xylophone Music in Ghana* (Crown Point, IN: White Cliffs Media Company, 1992), 3.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Suzanne G. Cusick, "On Musical Performances of Sex and Gender," in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, ed. Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley (Zurich and Los Angeles: Carciofoli, 1999).

noted, "The performative essence of music in turn weakens the strictures of context, history, and authenticity."[40] Although Agawu was insisting that African music be removed from a fixed time and space in order to focus on contemporary postcolonial African subjects, his point, as he later notes, is relevant in the fields of feminist musicology and gay/lesbian musicology as well. What he advocates for is not for music to be removed from historical and contextual frames, but that history and context become analyzed as *active* constructs. Veit Erlmann similarly points out that the concept of "tradition," often referenced as ahistorical and immobile, is actually "constituted in social practice."[41] Thus, as actors perform their traditions, they are making known their contemporary interpretation of ideas about shared history, values, and ideological systems.[42] Musical performances are often directly linked to group ideas about ethnicity, identity, and statements about who "we" are, in relation to who "they" are, and who "they" think "we" are. In the context of rural African performance, and especially in the context of a politically and economically marginalized ethnic group occupying border territory in rural Africa, performances of "traditional forms" often become strong statements about ethnic identity, at the same time that they become codified in the global imagination of who rural Africans are. By examining musical performances in this context, we can pull out both the performers' ideas about the ideologies they are referring to as well as how those ideologies are made more real through their performances. As these ideologies are

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[40] Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003), xxi.
[41] Veit Erlmann, *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 11.
[42] Ibid.

linked both physically and conceptually to the body, musical performances disclose much about gender and sexuality. The meanings attached to the performing body are frequently discussed in terms of authenticity and realness; however, through the theoretical lens of performativity, sexuality and gender are revealed, in as much as history and tradition are, as obtaining meanings in social space.

Judith Butler's, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* provides a basis for the analysis of gender performativity.[43] Butler is considered to be a radical constructivist, asserting that both sex and gender are phantasmatic; they are only real to the extent that they are performed. Butler critiques the construction of the feminist "we," asking "what is a woman?" What is this essential category we call woman? Butler maintains that the understanding of the construction of gender is such that the gender binary is reinforced between masculine and feminine, male and female. When a woman is born, social signifiers of femininity are mapped onto her body, and she is enculturated as a woman, as feminine. However, in this conception, there is no room for deviations from the "normal" range of socialization. In fact, not only is the gender binary naturalized, the heterosexual matrix is reinscribed. To Butler, it becomes necessary to destabilize the gender binary and offer the potential for ways of being that exists outside of the "normal" gender possibilities.

For Butler, there is no pre-discursive subject formation. Gender, which is not made real outside of production, is performed. According to Butler:

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[43] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, [1990] 1999).

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts.* The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality.* Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief.[44]

Thus, what appears to be natural is actually the way in which the "anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself."[45] This is significant because the performative aspects of gender allow for the possibility of change and variation. Butler suggests gender parody as a subversive act; through hyperbolic performances of gender such as drag, one can expose the mechanisms that shape gender and gendered expectations, revealing structures of valuation and signification. Since gender is being constantly re-performed, individuals are granted agency in reconfiguring gendered possibilities, and in achieving incremental change through performing alternative possibilities.

According to Rosalind Morris, part of the appeal of performativity is in the possibilities it opens up for non-normative performances.[46] For example, since performances are considered to be normal within a range of culturally intelligible regulatory schemas, bodies that fall outside this range can be embraced within a

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[44] Ibid., 179.
[45] Ibid., xv.
[46] Rosalind C. Morris, "All Made Up: Performance Theory and the New Anthropology of Sex and Gender," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 567-592.

performative model as subversive.[47] Thus, gender performance is compulsory but not pre-determined. Just because there is a range of gender performances that Western philosophical, psychological, and historical lineages term "normal," we have the agency to create new cultural possibilities, thus subverting the pre-existent model.

Queer theorists have drawn from Butler's understanding of sexuality as a fluid and constructed continuum, rather than as a fixed identity. Sexuality, in this conception can be understood as behavioral, rather than as a fixed part of identity. Judith Halberstam develops Butler's theories into the range of possibilities of female masculinity.[48] Halberstam notes that female masculinity is not a singular possibility, but is a range of possible subject positions. Also, the production of female masculinity is not naturally linked to sexuality. So female masculinity is by no means limited or available only to lesbian actors. By showing how female masculinity is available to many people, we can extend farther our understandings of the relationships between sex, gender, and sexuality. Consequently, the normally legitimated male masculinity will no longer be seen as natural or normal, nor the exclusive property of the male body.

Although instructive in analyzing performances of sex and gender in the context of the body, these theories are limited because they take place within a set of cultural norms. The performances, the repetition of actions understood as gender, must be understood as culturally intelligible, and are therefore not universally

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[47] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, [1990] 1999).
[48] Judith Halberstam, Female Masculinity (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

applicable. Butler's work is operating within a very specific legacy of Western theorization, as well as a Western understanding of what constitutes the categories of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, as Butler points out, even within any given cultural context, no subject is wholly defined by the category of gender.

> The theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness invariably close with an embarrassed "etc." at the end of the list. Through this horizontal trajectory of adjectives, these positions strive to encompass a situated subject, but invariably fail to be complete. This failure, however, is instructive: what political impetus is to be derived from the exasperated "etc." that so often occurs at the end of such lines? This is a sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself.[49]

I see within this the possibility of cross-cultural application. As Butler theorizes the possibilities and limitations of agency, she writes:

> …the enabling conditions for an assertion of 'I' are provided by the structure of signification, the rules that regulate the legitimate and illegitimate invocation of that pronoun, the practices that establish the terms of intelligibility by which that pronoun can circulate.[50]

By determining the located structures that impact how and when people can act, the rules through which they can assert agency, and the lenses through which bodily performances are interpreted, one can fruitfully analyze the performance of gender and sexuality in non-Western contexts. Drawing from queer theorists such as Halberstam, I ask how systems of difference operate in Dagara performances. This includes asking what constitutes "normal" performances as well as "transgressive" performances and if the rules of musical performance are somehow more or less expansive. Expanding upon Halberstam's *Female Masculinities* particularly, I

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[49] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, [1990] 1999), 182.
[50] Ibid., 183.

question whether female performances of male dominated musical genres and dance styles are considered transgressive, and whether or not those female bodies are considered to be performing "masculinity" or an alternative version of "femininity." Considering Butler's attention to the "exasperated etc" at the end of a "horizontal trajectory of adjectives" that seek to encompass all the possibilities of identity,[51] I find it necessary to ask which categories Dagara men and women are defined through and by, and who has control over the definitions. And if Butler is indeed correct that the inability to define subjects through a laundry list of adjectives is instructive in revealing the limitations of such categories, I inquire as to which aspects of Dagara subjectivity are not being attended to within the labels they have been provided.

In order to analyze performativity among the Dagara it is necessary to both locate the internal as well as the external categories of difference that are mapped onto their bodies. For example, there is a tendency in ethnomusicological literature to represent African subjects as inherently different than Western subjects.[52] These "notions of difference have been employed by scholars seeking to exercise a certain form of power over African subjects"[53] and to contribute to a body of knowledge that makes sense of African bodies as "different." It is necessary not to reinscribe notions of difference onto African bodies by assuming that the social category of gender, and performances of gender are not affected by the intersecting categories of age, race, ethnicity, class, status, and educational background, as well as larger

[51] Ibid., 182.
[52] Kofi Agawu, Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions (New York: Routledge, 2003).
[53] Ibid., xx.

socio-political power structures, the postcolonial landscape and colonial legacies. It is also crucial to recognize that the creation of internal categories of difference is no less regulatory than externally based ones. I ask, how are musical performances as well as performances of everyday actions, moments in which we can analyze systems of difference and sameness?

Feminist Ethnography

My work among the Dagara draws from feminist ethnographers who problematize issues of representation, question what constitutes anthropological knowledge, and seek new forms of writing and conducting ethnographic research that destabilize conventional anthropological models. In asking, "Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?" Lila Abu-Lughod articulates a constellation of theoretical and practical concerns regarding the integration of feminism, gender and sexuality studies, and ethnography.[54] Abu-Lughod clarifies the frequent contradictions of ethnographic research and representation with feminist political ideologies: Can a discipline such as anthropology, embedded with practices of "othering," ever truly offer solutions for de-centering narratives of self and other? And if so, what would those solutions be? Judith Stacey in her 1988 article of the same name has also illuminated these concerns. For Stacey, the potentials of feminist ethnography are

[54] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Can there be Feminist Ethnography?" Women and Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory 5 no.1 (1990): 7-27.

weighted with ethical concerns, perhaps to an extent beyond more "masculinist" approaches.[55]

In "Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?" Lila Abu-Lughod illustrates a trajectory of thought that emerged in anthropology to critique objectivism as a methodological and theoretical ideal. Anthropologists struggled with the boundaries of self and other that became demarcated through objectivist truth claims and the assumed invisibility of the researcher. The solution for these problems emerged in postmodern ethnographic techniques, as exemplified in the collection by Clifford and Marcus.[56] The response to the problems of ethnographic objectivity manifested in dialogical or polyvocal ethnographic techniques. According to Abu-Lughod, these ethnographers believed that "…Decolonization on the level of the text, would make clear that the voice of the narrator/anthropologist was only one among many and would allow the voices of the subjects to be heard."[57] While these techniques have come to be legitimate methods for addressing new ways of representing, Abu-Lughod points out that in a sense, they fail to address the heart of the anthropological problem. She writes, "epistemological issues—issues about how we know—have become to quickly elided with issues of how we represent, allowing a sort of sidestepping of the basic political issue at the heart of most anthropology—the issue of Western knowledge and representers, and non-Western knowns and

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[55] Judith Stacey, "Can there be a Feminist Ethnography," *Women's Studies International Forum* 11 no. 1 (1988): 21-27.

[56] James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[57] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Can there be Feminist Ethnography?" *Women and Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory* 5 no.1 (1990): 11

representeds. This is an issue of self and other, subject and object…"[58] In other words, the project of decolonizing anthropology is not yet complete.

For feminist anthropologists/ethnographers the problem of objectivity is not a matter of representation exclusively; it extends to a critique of objectivity as a gendered theoretical and methodological paradigm. That is, anthropology and its goals and tools are gendered, and through their implementation a gendered body of knowledge has been produced. Abu-Lughod offers a historical account of the methods that feminist ethnographers have utilized when addressing anthropological objectivity, the first being the "1st wave" critique of the absence of women's knowledge and experiences in the literature.[59] In addition to pointing out how women had been ignored, these studies looked at who was asking questions, and which questions were been asked or excluded. In these works, the ideal of objectivity remained unquestioned; the goal was to make the record *more* objective by incorporating women's voices, histories, experiences, etc. As Abu-Lughod notes, "2nd wave" feminist critiques of objectivity involved a "multi-faceted assault on 'objectivity' and the dichotomy between objective and subjective through which the term gains its meaning."[60] This entailed a more radical interrogation of the systems of valuation that grant meaning to objectivity. Abu-Lughod challenges the

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[58] Ibid.

[59] This critique extends across feminist disciplines. For example the 1st wave of musicology/ethnomusicology feminist/gender studies were aimed at "re-construction" or reinserting women's narratives into the historical accounts of music making. Like anthropology, musicology/ethnomusicology studies rebuilt history for alternative perspectives, looking critically at mechanisms of social control that prevented women from having access to musical experiences and forums. They also examined the seemingly "gender-neutral" methodological techniques of musicologists in order to critique Western knowledge production. See Pendle 1991; Bowers and Tick 1986; Marshall 1993; Reich 1985.

[60] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Can there be Feminist Ethnography?" *Women and Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory* 5 no.1 (1990): 12.

associations of objectivity to masculinity, arguing, "objectivity within science is both part of a dualism that is gendered and is a mode of power"[61] By questioning the neutrality that objectivity claims as a methodological and theoretical practice, feminist theorists pushed the boundaries of ethnographic possibilities and ideals.

Following these theories, feminist ethnography must challenge notions of objectivity and ultimately contest binaries of masculine and feminine that value some ways of knowing and representing over others. As Abu-Lughod notes, the idea of feminist ethnography is not without problems. She keenly elucidates the historical legacy of female writers, the ethnographies written by the wives of anthropologists, who utilized techniques that predated the "postmodern" ethnographers, such as focusing on individuals and everyday actions, personal relationships, inserting themselves into the narrative by addressing their positionality, and not making objectivist truth claims.[62] These ethnographies, although they reveal alternative visions of cultures, are not recognized as textual innovations by writers such as Clifford.[63] This raises the question: what is feminist ethnography, and why are these writers not considered? What systems of valuation are in play when creative and unconventional writing is devalued based on professional merit? Are "trained" anthropologists the only people allowed to speak for other cultures? Abu-Lughod notes that the structures that lend legitimacy to some forms of writing and representation need to be further interrogated.

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[61] Ibid., 13.
[62] Ibid., 18.
[63] James Clifford, "Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. Clifford, James and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 1-26.

The question of what women's writing is, what it looks like, and what it discusses needs further examination as well. Abu-Lughod offers her insight of what it might be:

> I had a vision of ethnography in a different voice and I wrote grant proposals in its name. The voice was to be that of a woman ethnographer listening to other women's voices. I looked to literary studies of women's writing for confirmation of my vague desire to write in a non-dominating way, to write about everyday experience, to write about women's views of their society and their lives, to write about individuals bound up in relationships with others, to look at the particular and avoid generalization, to write with care and attachment rather than distance, to participate rather than remove myself.[64]

Ultimately, Abu-Lughod decides that whatever women write is women's writing; it is not one thing, one style, or one perspective. She suggests that rather than adhere to legitimized forms of writing, women should fight for the acceptance of the multiplicity of female expressive forms.[65] Additionally, when thinking about women's writing, feminist ethnographers must address Western cultural stereotypes of femininity. What is a woman's voice? Who is a woman? These concerns are also manifest in "the most serious crisis within contemporary feminism…the crisis about difference."[66] As many theorists and activists have stated, there is no single category of Woman; "gender" has been deconstructed into multiple frames, fragmented selves, and mapped onto numerous bodies. The greatest challenge then becomes the development of a "politics of solidarity,

[64] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Can there be Feminist Ethnography?" *Women and Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory* 5 no.1 (1990): 22.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., 23.

coalition, or affinity built on the recognition of difference."[67] For Abu-Lughod, this is where feminist ethnography can make its greatest contribution.

Postmodern ethnographers, although they have found new ways of representing, have yet to unseat the subject/object divide inherent in anthropology. Feminist ethnographers, on the other hand, according to Abu-Lughod are in a position to move beyond these categories by utilizing feminist theoretical and methodological frameworks and epistemologies. "By working with the assumption of difference in sameness, of a self that participates in multiple identifications, and an other that is also partially the self, we might be moving beyond the impasse of the fixed self/other or subject/object divide that so disturbs the new ethnographers."[68] The contribution to ethnography "is an unsettling of the boundaries that have been central to its identity as a discipline of the self studying the other."[69] The disruption of a colonial legacy of anthropology in which the subject stands outside, speaking for the object at a cultural distance becomes obliterated in the recognition of multiplicity, sameness, difference, and solidarity that feminist ethnography has to offer.

Ethnomusicologists, as theorists and ethnographers have responded to and worked within the paradigm shift that Abu-Lughod is suggesting. Kofi Agawu, in his critique of Africanist ethnomusicology made many of the same charges that Abu-Lughod lobs at anthropology.[70] The focus on *difference* reifies differences and

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[67] Ibid., 24.
[68] Ibid., 25.
[69] Ibid., 26.
[70] Kofi Agawu, Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions (New York: Routledge, 2003).

creates gaps between subject and object, representer and represented, the West and the rest. The object is never offered the possibility for subjectivity; in terms of knowledge production, we are vastly limited in our capacity to come to understand another culture and their music.[71] For Agawu, the solution is to focus on sameness rather than the production of difference.[72] Just as Abu-Lughod suggests, our task is to recognize sameness and difference simultaneously, and find ways to represent and do research that move away from self and other, subject and object.

Third wave feminist writers also found new solutions for textual innovation and ethnographic goals and idealizations. Works such as *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*[73] were critical of the Second wave feminist movement for their exclusionary practices, and anticipated Third wave postcolonial critiques and writing styles. Writings in *This Bridge Called my Back* included poems, thought pieces written in colloquial language, and journal entries. The essays collected in this edition forge alliances among women of color and displace whiteness. They incorporate underrepresented voices and call attention to the canonization of feminist thought and to the need to bring race, class, and sexuality to the front of analyses alongside gender. Twenty-one years later, *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*[74] continues this work by expanding upon the ideas presented in *This Bridge called my Back. this bridge we call home* further problematizes the categories of *white* and *women of color,* recognizing that they are

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Cherríe L. Moraga, and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, eds. This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, Expanded and rev. 3rd edition (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002).
[74] Gloria E. Anzaldúa, and AnaLouise Keating, eds. *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

not fixed categories. This book "intends to change notions of identity, viewing it as part of a more complex system covering a larger terrain, and demonstrating that the politics of exclusion based on traditional categories diminishes our humanness."[75] The essays in this collection take race and gender as permeable categories, and call for the building of bridges across narrow classifications. As the authors write, "bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without."[76] This is reflected in the inclusion of white women's voices and male voices. This is necessary in order to truly problematize otherness, and to deconstruct binaryism and rigid identity constructions. Instead it recognizes a more expansive set of identities, which are in constant construction. As Anzaldua writes, "it's ultimately about doing away with demarcations like 'ours' and 'theirs.'"[77] This text is a radical transformation from a rigidly defined set of categories: masculine/feminine, gay/straight, black/white, to a postmodern feminist vision of a world in which borders are visible but not static, and bridges connect but not separate. It is emblematic of Abu-Lughod's vision of feminist ethnography that builds bridges of sameness while addressing difference, and finds ways of speaking and writing that truly challenge limiting notions of self and other, towards conversations among people.

My project, in many senses draws from each of these works. While conducting preliminary fieldwork trips I became aware of how "objective" researchers had excluded voices of dissent, and set out to establish a corrective

[75] Ibid., 2.
[76] Ibid., 3.
[77] Ibid., 4.

model. I believe that my project is a vision of feminist ethnography; I seek to challenge ideas about who gets to speak, and who the bearers of culture are. In my field, men have spoken for the whole, have made claims to be the producers of knowledge and the cultural repositories. In order to address this, I am required to work on a number of levels of feminist theory. Drawing from First wave studies, I must do the compensatory work of inserting women's narratives and histories. I need to ask questions about patriarchy and the production of gender ideologies though musical performances utilizing Second wave models of theory. I must also question rigid ideas of masculine and feminine and observe possible reconfigurations of gender onto new bodies. Ultimately, I hope to represent a perspective in which I am a participant, and in which the men and women I know and work with are present and knowing and represented through their own stories. In doing so, I want to represent the multiplicity of my self, and of other selves, and of community building, and resistance by men and women. My task as an ethnographer is not to bridge the gap between subject and object, but to recognize that I, too, am seen through a cultural lens, and to understand multiple ways of seeing realities and experiences through a "fusion of horizons."[78]

African Feminisms

This work draws from the body of literature subsumed under the broad heading "African feminisms," which is actually a collection of multiple approaches, theoretical stances, methodologies, and critiques that are grounded in historical and

[78] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics, Translated and Edited by David E. Linge, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

cultural specificities. This diverse scholastic field draws from postcolonial studies, feminist theory, Black feminist theory, African history, and diasporic scholarship. Not only are there a number of indigenous demarcations, there are multiple ways to construct the categories within African feminisms (country, region, theoretical genealogy, anglophone/francophone, pan-African).

Each of the major intellectual strands that run throughout the discipline of African Feminisms becomes elaborated differently in response to local ideologies and practices as well as to global trends. The first major theme is the critique of Western assumptions that have driven Western feminist studies of African women (as well as other "Third World" women). In these studies, the Western construction of the African subject relies upon representation of "voiceless victims of ever-deepening multiple oppression,"[79] African women are portrayed as powerless, and in need of intervention on their behalf. This results in the contrasting of Western, educated, "liberated" subjects to the subjugated African woman.[80] The focus of these studies is most frequently on women's burden of labor, polygamy, lack of intimacy in marriage, and seclusion from public life, which becomes read as oppression. Rather than examine the local constructions of these social conditions, African women are constructed as subjects prior to their entry into social relations, which renders them powerless, and without agency.[81] There is also a slippage here between power and authority. Several authors have noted the ways in which

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[79] Andrea Cornwall, "Introduction: Perspectives on Gender in Africa," in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 1.
[80] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
[81] Ibid.

African's women's power is often manifested utilizing alternate strategies.[82] There is a growing critique of the construction and representation of African women, and the "extent to which the particular, located, concerns of Western feminisms have been projected onto the figure of the African woman."[83] For example, the construction of the public/private spheres is granted valuation through a Western reading of women in Africa. To assume that a woman's power in the private sphere is less valuable because she does not have power in the public sphere relies upon Western feminist devaluations of the domestic, and the liberal feminist ideals of attaining equality to be mapped onto African women. Finally, the Western construction of the African subject does not critically interrogate, and in some cases reinscribes racialized images of African women's bodies and sexualities.

A related critique is the utilization of Western gender theories for African subjects; this critique requires the problematization of defining "gender" in Africa. These theories take for granted a unitary category of "woman."[84] According to Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, in *The Invention of Women*, "the fundamental category of 'woman'—which is foundational in Western gender discourses—simply did not exist in Yorubaland prior to its sustained contact with the West."[85] "The body was not the basis of social roles, inclusions, or exclusions; it was not the foundation of

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[82] Andrea Cornwall, "Introduction: Perspectives on Gender in Africa," in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Obioma Nnaemeka, "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29 no. 2 (2003): 257-385; Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[83] Andrea Cornwall, "Introduction: Perspectives on Gender in Africa," in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 2.

[84] Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, The Invention of Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[85] Ibid., ix.

social thought and identity."[86] Western gender theory relies upon "bio-logic"—or ideology of biological determinism—which argues that our social positions are constructed based on our biological sexuality. In order to apply this bio-logic to the Yoruba social world, the category of woman had to be invented. Thus, the category of 'woman' is generated from Western philosophy, history, and science; it emanates from a particular ideology and historical narrative. The unexamined application of this category to other cultures disregards alternate modes of social organization.[87] Oyèwùmí asserts that by analyzing gender categories in the African context, they are, in effect, writing these categories into the culture.[88] An extension of the application of Western conceptions of gender to African subjects, is the emphasis on sexuality in studies performed by Western feminists. According to Oyèwùmí, this causes the focus of women's identities to be on their relationships with and against men, which implicitly reinscribes a heteronormative model.[89] Other scholars have elaborated that the uncritical application of Western gender theory carries with it an assumed conflict with men, which is found in Western feminism.[90] These scholars argue that in African feminisms, the sexual power relationships, as well as the techniques of negotiation, and strategies of female empowerment, are not identical to those found in the West; African sexual and gendered relationships need to be examined with locally grounded theoretical models.

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[86] Ibid., x.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Andrea Cornwall, "Introduction: Perspectives on Gender in Africa," in Readings in Gender in Africa, ed. Andrea Cornwall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Obioma Nnaemeka, "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 29 no. 2 (2003): 257-385.

African feminist scholars reject the projection of Western ways of making sense of difference onto African female bodies. Oyèwùmí outlines several ideas that are commonly used in Western feminist writings that are imposed on African women. 1.)Gender categories are universal and timeless, 2). Gender is a fundamental organizing principle in all societies, 3). There is an essential, universal category of woman, 4). The subordination of women is universal, and 5). The category of woman is precultural, it is fixed in historical time and cultural space in antithesis to another fixed category—man.[91] African feminist scholars, by rejecting the uncritical, ethnocentric, colonialist, mapping of Western thought onto their bodies are doing the important work of reclaiming subjectivity, and are refusing to be the "object" of study.

As Mohanty writes, there are two projects operating simultaneously, and both are integral to decolonizing feminist scholarship.[92] The first is the crucial postcolonial critique of colonizing methods of studying and writing; the second is a project of building upon local histories, cultures, and genealogies of thought to develop theoretical models and narratives that reflect the lives, needs, desires, projects, and goals of women.[93] Obioma Nnaemeka terms this project, "building on the indigenous."[94] This project requires scholars to explore other dimensions of

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[91] Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, The Invention of Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
[92] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
[93] Ibid.
[94] Obioma Nnaemeka, "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29 no. 2 (2003): 257-385.

African women's relationships.[95] For example, instead of privileging the husband/wife binary, a more appropriate approach is to examine relationships between brothers/sisters, mother/daughter, between sisters, co-wives, etc. By de-privileging male/female power relationships, alternative mechanisms for deriving power and strategies for attaining support and resources can be elucidated. Gloria Wekker, for example, in her work among Afro-Surinamese women finds that female-female relationships and social networks are strategies of support and empowerment.[96] This tactic also decenters women's relationships with men as their central form of identity and allows for the exploration of multiple social identities, which more accurately reflect women's experiences. Several scholars have noted that the focus on heterosexuality fails to address the importance of "maternal politics" and the value of motherhood in Africa.[97] Motherhood in Africa, as well as other female-female social relationships can be productively viewed as a political strategy.

Truly fruitful feminist scholarship in Africa needs to re-define gendered relationships and performance. For example, Ifi Amadiume, in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands,* investigates the separation of sex and gender, and problematizes power and gendered relationships.[98] She looks at femininity and masculinity and how they are defined, writing that what makes someone masculine or feminine may

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[95] Andrea Cornwall, "Introduction: Perspectives on Gender in Africa," in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).
[96] Gloria Wekker, The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora (New York: Columbia University Press, 20060.
[97] Catherine Acholonu, Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism (Owerri, Nigeria: Afa Publications, 1995); Obioma Nnaemeka, ed. Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998).
[98] Ifi Amadiume, Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society (London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1987).

not be confined to sex, but rather to performance, personality, and character. This work provides an important locally grounded analysis.

Further elaboration of building on the indigenous is found in the cooperation between women and men, against individualism.[99] According to Nnaemeka, constructing women in opposition to men both practically and conceptually fails to take into account indigenous worldviews that may have alternate ways of constructing male/female. Relationships to men may not encompass the entirety of women's identity and desires.[100] Oyèwùmí points out several categories of difference that are critical in examining power dynamics in Africa, which have been frequently overlooked in favor of gender relationships.[101] Seniority and wealth are two important social factors in Africa, as evidenced, for example, by linguistic practices: "my senior brother," "my junior sister," "my father's first wife." These relationships of age and economics often determine power dynamics. According to Cornwall, "focusing on other dimensions of difference and dynamics of oppression undermines both the myth of female solidarity and the presumption of universal male domination."[102] As these themes are elaborated through historical and cultural specificities, a rich body of African feminist thought emerges that relies upon local ways of seeing and acting in the world. Additionally, differences emerge in

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[99] Obioma Nnaemeka, "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 29 no. 2 (2003): 257-385.
[100] Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994).
[101] Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
[102] Andrea Cornwall, "Introduction: Perspectives on Gender in Africa," in *Readings in Gender in Africa,* ed. Andrea Cornwall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 4.

approaches, theories, and methodologies that importantly emphasize the heterogeneity of African feminist projects and schools of thought.

In seeking theoretical models that emerge from within local cultures, and respond to local projects, as Mohanty[103] argues for, there are some contradictions and new problems that arise. As I have already mentioned, there is a problem with essentializing African-ness as an alternative to Western feminism. A tendency in the literature is to strategically group African women together for illustrative or political purposes. This results in a homogenization of African women, who have local/regional/ethnic/national/linguistic/class-based differences. I will address these differences primarily by focusing on individual women's voices, each with a unique history and perspective, but will also show how these women work in alliance with each other. The formation of group desires should never override the necessary inclusion of individual stories and perspectives. Portraying individual experiences contributes valuable insight into African women as active subjects and resists the First World imperative to portray them as either monolithic or powerless. Additionally, revealing ethnic and class-based differences contributes to de-centering the emergent canon of African feminist writing. In a postcolonial context, gender must be examined as it relates to power in a number of forms; not only on the personal level, but within economic/racial structures of power, and situated within a global context.

Additionally, there must be a balance between the imperative to reject the distortion of Western theories and privilege indigenous ways of being, with the

[103] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

potential damage of idealizing all indigenous cultural practices. Evocations of the "traditional" can be homogenizing as well. Idealizing an African past or "traditions" does not always empower women, but can possibly reinforce structures that serve to limit women's choices, agency, and opportunities. Writing about building on the indigenous, and emphasizing the positive aspects of male/female relationships, Nnaemeka points out that the "unexamined exaggeration of gender complementarity masks real and insidious gender inequalities and conflicts, particularly in racist and imperialist contexts."[104] In working to privilege the local, scholars must also show how women respond to and move within globalized circumstances and knowledge production.

My project relies less on the "merging" of Western and African feminisms, and more on a critical analysis of the dialogue produced between people. I locate female strategies for empowerment and listen for ways of speaking that may or may not resemble those found in the West. I resist characterizing Dagara ways of acting and thinking as a uniform type of "feminism;" I have found multiple strategies and multi-dimensional subversive potentialities in the actions and verbalizations of Dagara women. I will present women's voices in dialogue with each other, because they are both literally and metaphorically speaking to each other. They literally pass on knowledge about relating to one's husband, and share stories about romantic entanglements, lost loves, and strategize about obtaining power. They speak through actions and performances, both musical and otherwise. I have come to

[104] Obioma Nnaemeka, "Mapping African Feminisms," in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 39.

relate to these women as a community across several borders, and seek to represent them as such. I engage here with the African feminist call to emphasize relationships beyond male and female and to look for empowerment in the relationships of co-wives, sisters, and friends. By doing so, I lend primacy to their experiences and ways of knowing that lie outside of a feminist theoretical paradigm.

Beyond that, Dagara women's interaction with Western feminism is not a clear-cut boundary. One cannot label a need or an action "Western." To do so is to re-emphasize a tradition-bound African subject prevented from interacting with a global world. The conversation between multiple feminisms reveals several possible ways of being. The site of agency is in the *interpretation* and *performance* of a way of thinking or being, not in its origin. Thus, if a Dagara woman adopts a "Western feminist outlook," her performance and understanding will irrevocably shape the production of her actions and thoughts, and it is no longer Western.[105] Although I have found the Dagara women draw from multiple feminist strategies, they often are confronted with ideologies that are specifically positioned *against* Western feminism. The conceptual positioning of being anti-feminist also affects women's abilities to utilize these strategies. Furthermore, some ways of acting have become labeled as "white" in order to specifically prevent transgressive behavior. Because of this, I illustrate how this tactic is both an effective regulatory schema but also how women maneuver around this. What emerges most evidently in this dissertation is how women are able to create many forms of empowering strategies, only some of

[105] This argument draws from Thomas Turino's discussion of indigenization, in which African actors actively re-interpret global signs and thus reclaim them; cf. Turino, 2000.

which are verbally articulated. It is often through musical performance and dance that women form resistant coalitions.

Postcoloniality, Representation, Language, and Power

My narrative style in this dissertation has been inspired by ethnographers, poets, novelists, and theorists who use language and writing as a means to communicate information while simultaneously critiquing the power position of the author and the structures that legitimize some voices while silencing others. These writers use a variety of narrative techniques to draw attention to the problems inherent within the anthropological enterprise while providing possibilities for more collaborative modes of speaking and writing. In addition to the necessary critique of certain ways of representing that are oppressive and restrictive, these authors recognize the discursive silencing that takes place when some voices are granted authority over others, and insist that those who have been prevented from speaking find a place within scholarly literature. They also point out that there are ways of listening to and dialoguing with the silences in every story. Those silences, in fact, speak volumes about power hierarchies and privilege.

In her book, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* Trinh T. Minh-ha critiques ways of representing and speaking about "others" that have become institutionally sanctioned forms of oppression, "We set out here, she and I, to undo an *anonymous,* all-male, and predominantly white collective entity

named *he,* and we wish to freeze him once in a while in his hegemonic variants."[106]

She asserts that anthropological accounts are primarily:

> …a conversation of "us" with "us" about "them"…in which "them" is silenced. "Them" always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence. Subjects of discussion, "them" is only admitted among "us," the discussing subjects, when accompanied or introduced by an "us"…[107]

Minh-ha finds a solution in rejecting "his" ways of talking and representing and knowing and in constructing news ways of thinking about dialogue and what constitutes knowledge:

> Thus, I see no interest in adopting a progression that systematically proceeds from generalities to specificities, from outlines to fillings, from diachronic to synchronic, or vice versa. And I am profoundly indifferent to his old way of theorizing—of piercing, as he often claims, through the sediments of psychological and epistemological 'depths.' I may stubbornly turn around a foreign thing or turn it around to play with it, but I respect its realms of opaqueness. Seeking to perforate meaning by forcing my entry or breaking it open to dissipate what is thought to be its secrets seems to me as crippled an act as verifying the sex of an unborn child by ripping open the mother's womb. It is typical of a mentality that proves incapable of touching the living thing without crushing its delicateness. I undeniably prefer the heterogeneity of free play in a dice game to the unity and uniformity of dissection, classification, and synthesis toward a higher truth.[108]

Suzanne Cusick similarly writes about her distaste for musical analyses that "*feel* like essentializing strategies" and her "deep, deep reluctance to engage in what feels like the dismemberment of music's body into the categories 'form,' 'melody,' 'rhythm,' 'harmony.' Because…both the essentializing and the dismembering strategies *feel* akin to those violences as they are committed to the bodies of real

[106] Ibid., 48.
[107] Ibid., 67.
[108] Ibid., 48-49.

women, and because I am being serious when I say I love music, I cannot bear to do those things to a beloved."[109]

Minh-ha's narrative is woven using a range of techniques that embody the critiques she discusses in the text. She cleverly uses interrupted speech, where the parenthetical words hold alternative meanings or witty self-critiques. Minh-ha does not always present her arguments in a linear fashion, but offers ideas that weave in and out of the narrative, in order to be re-examined and continued throughout. She also plays with words by including a variety of voices from disparate traditions in a variation of ways: through quotes and poems and citations, she allows voices to speak to each other, but not in a static monotone voice; her writing becomes polyvocal and dimensional, revealing the layers of meanings and sounds of speech and *what lies beneath the speech*. Minh-ha suggests "talking nearby instead of talking about" as a way of "speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it."[110]

Issues of representation are complex and require the author to wrestle with power, privilege, and in many cases the legacy of colonialism. Linda Alcoff argues that the social location of the speaker is epistemically significant to the claims being made and what effect these claims have. Thus the divergence in social location

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[109] Suzanne G. Cusick, "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort not to Think Straight," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, eds. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, [1994] 2006), 76-77.

[110] Nancy N. Chen, "Speaking Nearby: A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha," *Visual Anthropology Review* 8 no. 1 (Spring 1992): 87.

between who is speaking and who is being spoken about has effects beyond its immediate context. "Who is speaking to whom turns out to be as important for meaning and truth as what is said: in fact, what is said turns out to change according to who is speaking and who is listening."[111] The result of this speaking for is often a reinscription of existent power hierarchies and privileged positions and the continued silencing of marginalized voices.[112] Agawu writes that the solution is to "work toward the direct empowerment of postcolonial African subjects so that they can eventually represent themselves."[113] The problem with this solution is discussed in Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak," in which she points out that not speaking for the oppressed assumes that the oppressed have full access to the structures of power which would enable them to be heard.[114] She suggests as a solution, not "speaking for" but instead creating the "conditions for dialogue,"[115] or "speaking to."[116] This enables the production of "countersentences" to the narrative of the ethnographer.[117]

Other authors have theorized the power and politics of language and silence. Suzanne Cusick, writing about gender and musicology, points out that by telling a story from the dominant historical perspective, which is taken to represent the

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[111] Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991-92): 12.
[112] Ibid., 5-32.
[113] Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 70.
[114] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.
[115] Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991-92): 5-32.
[116] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.
[117] Ibid.

entire story, existent power hierarchies are legitimated.[118] Part of the task of feminist musicology, then, becomes challenging that grand narrative by questioning absences and silences, and drawing silences into the conversation.[119] The act of listening to silences, of telling a story through a narrative of exclusion, is a narrative technique as well as a political action. Dagara women, and most particularly, Dagara women's musical lives have remained absent from popular and academic discourse. Just as there is a triangulation of discursive power between the speaker, the listener, and the context[120], I submit that there is a power triangulation in silence; because silence, too, tells part of the story. Hierarchies of power are elucidated when reading between the lines of what has been written and spoken. If we ask, why haven't we heard other voices in these narrations, the answer is because some ways of speaking and some speakers are privileged and other are not. The act of silencing is not a neutral act, because it is through discourse that power structures are made real. Minh-ha writes, "language is one of the most complex forms of subjugation, being at the same time the locus of power and unconscious servility."[121] By not attentively listening for alternative ways of speaking, not only are we re-inscribing the privileging of certain voices, but we also allow dissenting voices to go unheard. We therefore must ask, why, and in what ways have Dagara women been absented from a narrative in which they have always been fully present. What particular structures

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[118] Suzanne G. Cusick, "Gender, Musicology and Feminism," in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 471-482.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972); Ibid., *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage Books, 1972).
[121] Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 52.

restrict their ability to share their experiences and have them be heard? We need to ask how to give weight to silent voices, and to whispers.

Hélène Cixous wrote, "Woman must write her self…Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement."[122] Cixous and Belgian theorist, Luce Irigaray, were influenced by Jacques Derrida's theories of logocentrism in Western culture and Simone de Beauvoir's criticism of phallocentric theories of sexuality and subjectivity. Extending these critiques, Cixous and Irigaray note that language, like other aspects of culture, is gendered. They combine the concept of logocentrism, used to describe the privileging of the spoken over the written word, with phallocentrism, to describe Western cultural structures and systems as phallogocentric. According to Cixous and Irigaray, women enter into language in different ways than men do, and the subject positions open to women are not the same as men. However, because of the phallogocentrism of Western culture, women are forced into participation in structures of language, sexuality, and subjectivity that are inherently masculine, because that is what is privileged.

In addition to offering a critique, Cixous and Irigaray develop a corrective model, l'*écriture féminine,* a feminine way of writing. Cixous's essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," in which she pens, "Women must write her self…" is a critique of the phallogocentric order and a call for women to reclaim language. Urging women to write, and describing the moment in which she ruptures from oppression, Cixous says:

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[122] Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. Signs 1 no. 4 (Summer, 1976): 875-893.

> An act that will also be marked by woman's seizing the occasion to speak, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression. To write and thus to forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become at will the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process.
>
> It is time for women to start scoring their feats in written and oral language.
>
> Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away-that's how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak-even just open her mouth-in public. A double distress, for even if she transgresses, her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine.
>
> It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem.[123]

Writing, for Cixous and Irigaray, is both the literal act of writing and an exploration of female sexuality. Not only must women produce text, but also they must explore their sexuality and their bodies not through masculine ideals, but through and for their own pleasure. Irigaray notes that female sexuality, like feminine writing is based on plurality, and multiplicity.[124] Cixous and Irigaray notice that feminine writing would not look (or sound) like masculine writing, because the two constructions of sexuality and subjectivity are not identical. So what will it look/sound like?

> It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized,

[123] Ibid., 880-881.

[124] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is not One*, Translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, [1977] 1985).

> enclosed, coded-which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.[125]

L'écriture féminine, whatever it looks/sounds like, will cause a rupture in the phallogocentric order and expose it as such, a structure, and not an inevitable way of being.

I draw from the theory of *l'écriture féminine,* both in exploring narrative styles that challenge the linear, masculinist, objectivist, truth claiming ethnographic accounts, and also by actively looking for ways of speaking and writing that might not be conventionally considered as such. This includes listening for silenced voices, but also for seeking out new ways of communication that can be considered writing such as dance and daily performances of the feminine, which are expressed through female bodies.

There are several reasons why Dagara women's stories might have been excluded from the majority of accounts of the Dagara people. In rural Dagaraland, fewer women speak English or French than men. Women are less present in public spaces, in positions of authority, and are generally less visible than men, although this continues to shift. For people conducting research, it can be easy either to overlook women's experiences, or to have trouble accessing them. In an email conversation with ethnomusicologist Trevor Wiggins, who has conducted extensive

[125] Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs* 1 no. 4 (Summer, 1976): 883.

research in the area around Nandom, which is to the southeast of Fielmua, he wrote to me that he heard rumors about Dagara women who could play the gyil, but he could not get any of them to admit that they did. Although he was able to record women's singing, female gyil performance is far less common, and rarely takes place in public. As I will show, women often fear public performance, and tend to avoid self-promotion or attention seeking. The inability to access women's stories of their experiences as gyil players accounts for the dearth of information.

According to American percussionist Valerie Naranjo, her performance on the gyil at the 1988 Kob-bine Festival in Lawra led to a "chiefly decree in the Dagara nation that women be allowed to play the instrument for the first time."[126] In 2009, Naranjo starred in a documentary, *Knock on Wood: The Rhythm of Change*, in which she makes further claims about how her performances on the gyil changed Dagara gender ideology. From her website, *Knock on Wood:*

> is about music and how a single individual can change the status quo. This documentary by Ron Grunhut is the story of Valerie's groundbreaking trip to Ghana where her quest to master an obscure West African marimba led to an unexpected change in the Dagara tribe's relationship to its women.[127]

Naranjo's statements illustrate that Dagara women's gyil performance has not been fully noticed possibly because it does not occur in public spaces as often as in private spaces, which are less valued. It also demonstrates that Dagara women's musical lives have not been documented fully, in part because as more and more Western people perform gyil publically, greater value is attributed to public performance of the instrument as a means of stimulating cultural marketability. Her

[126] http://www.mandaramusic.com/aboutval1.html
[127] http://www.mandaramusic.com/index.html

statements made on her website and in the film are a prime example of exclusion. Dagara women have a long history of gyil performance that was not altered by Naranjo's performance. Interestingly, that Naranjo was unaware that Dagara women do play the xylophone points to the valuation of public performance space.

Among Dagara music scholars, gender restrictions placed on the gyil, the gendering of Dagara performance spaces, and the gender ideologies that surround music have not been attended to, which contributes to discursive silencing. Michael Vercelli, a Dagara music scholar, performer, and educator, includes in his D.M.A. dissertation a recounting of the origin myth of the gyil.[128] He includes six variations of the story in his work, told by six prominent male gyil players. Each version carries the perspective of the teller, an authorial voice of historical memory. Each of these versions leaves out the portion of the origin myth that specifically addresses gender and the gendered restrictions placed on the instrument. I was curious as to whether it was Vercelli who excluded the information or the men he spoke with. In an email conversation Vercelli wrote,

> The gender thing is a funny question. No one had referred to it as being gendered until you started your research and Bernard [Woma] brought it up. Its not something I specifically asked, and no one volunteered…It certainly was not mentioned by anyone I interviewed.[129]

These statements illustrate the relativity of field research and how the questions we ask have a direct impact on the answers we receive, and consequently on the discursive knowledge produced by our work. Dagara discourse on the gyil and the gendering of the instrument has guided performance practice and continues to

[128] Michael B. Vercelli, "Performance Practice of the Dagara-Birifor Gyil Tradition Through the Analysis of the Bewaa and Daarkpen Repertoire," (D.M.A. doc.,University of Arizona, Tucson, 2006).
[129] Vercelli/Lawrence personal communication March 9, 2009.

shape social circumstances for female gyil players. It therefore becomes necessary to question not only why female gyil players have been excluded from popular and academic accounts of the gyil, but also who is benefiting from their exclusion.

My dissertation specifically works to bring Dagara women's voices back into the dialogue, to attend to their musical lives and experiences, and to question exclusionary practices that continue to devalue their knowledge. I draw from writers who advocate for alternative narrative styles that point to other ways of knowing, writing, and being. This involves locating and privileging Dagara women's voices and knowledge and listening for other modes of communication.

Several ethnographers have incorporated these critiques into their research methodologies and textual representations. Michelle Kisliuk produced what she terms "performance ethnography" which is the "narrative evocation of interactions, and meanings of performance wherein the ethnographer must be written into the text… as a continuously interwoven awareness and exploration of the interpersonal negotiations, power dynamics, and epistemological grappling involved in research and writing."[130] Thus, performance is not only the subject, but also a way of coming to know, and a means for representing the known. Kisliuk reframes the ethnographic voice by allowing the reader to see her ethnography as a performance in which she in constantly present, constantly reflective, and only partially knowing.[131] Kisliuk does not makes claims to "sameness" but through her eyes we

[130] Michelle Kisliuk, *Seize the Dance!: BaAka Musical Life and The Ethnography of Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1998] 2001), 13.
[131] Ibid.

come to see sameness in humanity, and learn with her as she notices differences that cause her to reflect upon herself.

I have been deeply affected by ethnographers who present information, not as removed from experience, but as emergent.[132] How you come to know and understand is of equal importance to what information is gleaned. Renato Rosaldo, for example, illustrates in "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage,"[133] that it is only by experiencing grief that he comes to understand that the process of realization is ultimately as instructive as the knowledge that one obtains. These writers are not the focus of the story, only the lens, the way in which we learn about those who they are representing.

I have also been motivated by writers who blur the lines of fiction and ethnography, calling into question what constitutes anthropological knowledge. As Chernoff notes, the distinctions between scholarly writing and fiction writing are themselves constructs, as fiction is informed by "real" life, and academic writing also involves interpretation and analysis by a situated author.[134] These authors chose storytelling as a technique to relay information about people and their lives.[135] Chernoff writes that "many people associate knowledge with critical distance," and

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[132] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1977] 2007); Renato Rosaldo, "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," in *Culture and Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, [1989] 1993), 1-24; Gloria Wekker, *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
[133] Renato Rosaldo, "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," in *Culture and Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, [1989] 1993), 1-24.
[134] John Miller Chernoff, *Hustling is not Stealing: Stories of an African Bar Girl* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
[135] Ibid.; Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, *Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village* (New York: Doubleday, 1965); Bernard Lortat-Jacob, *Sardinian Chronicles* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

yet it is through the eyes of his heroine that we come to learn about her life, and the life of women in West Africa.[136] In *Guests of the Sheik* Elizabeth Fernea tells her story of living with women in a village in southern Iraq. Although she presents her memoire as fiction, what emerges through the stories is a clear picture of the lives of the women she knew. Lila Abu-Lughod suggests that:

> By focusing on individuals and their changing relationships, one could also subvert the most problematic connotations of 'culture:' homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness…Individuals are confronted with choices; they struggle with others, make conflicting statements, argue about points of view on the same events, undergo ups and downs in various relationships and changes in their circumstances and desires… [137]

Therefore, storytelling allows the reader to move with individuals as they navigate the complexities of their lives more fully, because the story is not required to have critical distance. Each of these ethnographers wove those stories into, what can be called "critical ethnography" by selecting the stories and revealing a situated, yet detailed picture of the lives of the people they know and seek to represent.

My Narrative Style

My narrative style emerges from the theoretical engagements described above. Spivak's suggestion to "creating the conditions for dialogue" and Minh-ha's technique of "speaking nearby" informed and guided my research methodology. The narrative then, must be a reflection of how I conducted my fieldwork. I remember my fieldwork as a series of conversations and of moments, and the writing style

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[136] John Miller Chernoff, *Hustling is not Stealing: Stories of an African Bar Girl* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 6.
[137] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 14

presented here is intended to provide the reader with those conversations and with the memories of moments and lived experiences. Of course, the lens of interpretation is mine, and I can only provide the account from the way that I saw and thought about my experiences and the stories that were told to me. In order to combat the privileging of my voice and perspective, I provide the stories that I heard, the information that people offered to me, through the voices of the tellers. This includes the use of Ghanaian English phrases, and Dagara phrases at times. I do this to evoke the language of the teller as well as the mode of communication. In addition to the narrative, my editorial voice punctuates the text.

I problematize self/other, subject/object boundaries by keeping myself present in the text throughout, but without privileging my voice or my social position. It is necessary for me to theorize that position in order to offer insight into how differences are recognized and interpreted. The way that people see and relate to me not only shaped my experience, but impacted the types of relationships I was able to form, and in some cases, the opportunities that were not available to me. As Alcoff writes, the ability to retreat is itself a choice only available to those with power, which includes deciding how and when to speak.[138] By placing myself in the text in relation to others, and considering how my social positions effected those relationships I hope to destabilize the binary positions of self/other, Western/African, researcher/researched, white/black, outsider/insider, and the

[138] Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991-92): 5-32; see also, Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.

techniques that reinscribe these (often arbitrary) binaries, or at the very least to ask what power positions they uphold.

Moments of conversation with women and experiences of daily life with women formed the majority of my fieldwork. I think this confused my friends, who were waiting for me to "do something." I found the most instruction in the smallest of activities and in listening to what people said to each other. I tried to silence my inner interpreter and just be with and around the people I was learning from. As I recall the experiences of the Dagara men and women I lived with here I often do not point out directly any one moment of particular significance. I have not divided my chapters into small sections, which are intentionally written as a story. The prose twists and turns, like remembering does, or angles and departs from one memory to another. Similar to Kisliuk's "performance ethnography," I try not to isolate "important" things, but allow the telling of the story and the interpretation of the experience to create a large picture of the lives of the men and women I seek to represent here. Although many of the stories or memories might appear at-first mundane, they appear here as they appeared in life, and I find great significance in listening to people talk about their lives and their interpretation of their experiences.

Minh-ha writes that the actuality of story telling, like the actuality of lived experience is not linear. There are snippets of conversations, stories, things remembered, dialogue, smiles, and winks that move in and out. There "no need for a linear progression which gives the comforting illusion that one knows where one

goes."[139] This narrative, too, is as non-linear as possible. The people who are introduced in this text appear throughout, weaving in and out of each other's stories, as they do in life. Over time, the connections between people, their relationships to one another, and the commonalities as well as differences between them emerge. It has been most intentional to keep the individuality of each of the people I know, so as not to homogenize or essentialized an emblematic or authentic Dagara-ness or Dagara woman's experience. The differences between the women and men provide a more nuanced, richer, picture of the actuality of lived experience in rural Dagaraland.

The organization of the text is also intended to be non-linear. The chapters have not been numbered, but are named after some of the individuals that became and continue to be significant in my life. The people who I knew emerge in many chapters, sometimes without an introduction. As you get to know them, parts of their story and lives come together throughout the text as a whole. I do not envision the larger breakdowns as chapters, as much as vignettes or exploratory passages, however, for the ease of the reader, I refer to them as chapters. The text is organized in this fashion not only to provide a space for people's individual stories to emerge and weave through each other, but to allow the broader themes present in the dissertation to weave in and out of each other as well. You can envision the dissertation as a whole, an experience, which is turned around and around to be looked at from different angles. Each chapter is intended to contain each of the

[139] Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman*, *Native*, *Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 1.

themes of the dissertation, but provides a different perspective or another analytical lens through which to view that theme. The dissertation represents the porous, fractured, dynamic, bricolage of people's lives, and the writing reflects this.

Chapter Breakdown

The themes encapsulated in this dissertation are found within my friend Rejoice's comment about her participation in "the animal called culture." First, I address how narratives of tradition, culture, and authenticity are mobilized as regulatory tactics to control Dagara women's bodies. I point out who has access to deploying these narratives and for what purposes. I then illustrate how women respond to this systematic regulation through gyil performance, singing, dancing, policy development, and resource building. By demonstrating who is not granted access to defining the terms of cultural authenticity, and deciding what constitutes tradition, I expose the power hierarchies operating in Dagara women's lives and how they utilize resistant strategies that often remain unarticulated. Secondly, I ask how notions of ethnicity, culture, and tradition are racialized in order to demarcate boundaries of belonging. Within the racialization of cultural boundaries, notions of insider and outsider are established that specifically reference a rejection of certain Western paradigms. As I will show, not all notions of outsider, Western, and white are deemed inaccessible or transgressive. By determining which "Western" ways of being, thinking, and acting are considered cultural violations, I am able to point to who controls cultural parameters and who is authorized to say what constitutes Dagara identity. The conflation of outsider/Western/white is significant, because it

points to specific ideas about group membership. Third, I demonstrate how the concepts of tradition and cultural authenticity are held in opposition to Ghana's national policies of gender equity and gender mainstreaming. By examining how national policy and rhetoric are adopted or rejected I show that the material lives of women and children particularly are affected. I provide explanations from men and women across class divisions as to the relative effectiveness of gender-related policies. Rather than existing in a policy level vacuum, local ideas about gender equality have become enmeshed in the educational and health care sectors, and are present in the operation of NGOs working in rural Dagaraland. Fourth, I ask how Dagara women respond to the macro-conversations of cultural authenticity on the one hand and national policy implementation on the other. These responses are shaped by the individual circumstances of the women, particularly their class position and educational status. Dagara women respond to the macro-conversations about gender, which they are largely excluded from participating in, through musical performance, dancing, speaking, and resource building. I interpret their various responses, and how their actions can be fruitfully read as resistant political strategies. Finally, I demonstrate the contributions that Dagara women's narratives are making to postcolonial feminist theory and African musical scholarship. It is my sincere belief that the stories and strategies of Dagara women are dialoging with global networks of feminist thought even as they re-write local narratives and cultural possibilities. Their performances offer new models for understanding resistance, female networking, and development.

●GEORGINA●

"These eyes of children
windows
on our hope:
that
ALL RESISTANCE IS
TRIUMPHANT RESISTANCE.
All love
is revolution
& all touch
a form of love.

The moment of revolt is the moment of victory."

–Diane Di Prima, from "Revolutionary Letter #69"

"Gender Confusion is a Small Price to Pay for Social Progress"
–Mr. July Drag King "Stafford," quoted in Judith Halberstam, Female Masculinities

I first met Georgina Waabe through a mutual friend in Fielmua, Ghana during my field research conducted between 2009-2010. My friend Kosagr introduced me to her, knowing that I had a research interest in female gyil players. I had been asking him to introduce me to her for a few weeks, but I could never seem to get him to take me to her house. I felt as though perhaps I wasn't being clear as to exactly how much I wanted to meet her, or that for me it was more than a passing interest. Eventually, after I confronted him directly on the issue, Kosagr told me that he thought that Georgina's husband wouldn't agree to her associating with me. I asked for an explanation and was told that because I am white, the husband might think that I was going to have a corrupting influence on her behavior. This was frustrating

news; in the same manner that my relationship with Rejoice was affected by her husband's perception of my outsider-ness, I was worried that my research would become permanently impaired by assumptions about my behavior, ideologies, and perspective on Dagara culture. Without ever saying anything about my perception of local customs, it seemed as though people in Fielmua assumed that I was in disagreement with their traditions. I did not want this to become the roadblock that prevented me from moving forward, and so I decided to move forward and handle any of the husband's concerns directly. I told Kosagr that I still wanted to be introduced to Georgina and her husband, and would assure him of my intentions. A meeting was set up for the following day at Georgina's husband's home.

The next morning, following the local practice, I went to the bar and purchased a bottle of Schnapps to bring with me as a gift for Georgina's husband. I walked to the house with my friend Joyce, who I had invited in order to translate my intentions to the family and the precise extent of my project. I didn't want there to be any miscommunications about why I was living in Fielmua, and why I wanted to interview Georgina. Based on Kosagr's reticence to introduce me to the husband, I was delighted and surprised that Georgina's husband appeared to have no reservations about granting permission for Georgina to work with me. I asked her if she would be willing to come to my home to be interviewed. She agreed, and the following week she came to the house.

This had all taken place during the first few months of my field research, and although my Dagara language skills were developing, I did not feel capable of conducting the entire interview in Dagara. I was anxious to learn a lot from

Georgina, and wanted to ask questions that extended beyond what I thought I was capable of communicating. Because Georgina speaks no English, I asked Joyce once again to act as my translator. In the afternoon, Georgina, her husband,[1] and a few of her friends arrived at my house. I invited Georgina into my living room where she, Joyce, and myself sat around my coffee table. I requested permission to record the interview, and after she agreed, I set up my recorder and began asking what I thought were thoughtful questions. After the interview, which lasted about an hour, we went into the courtyard of the house where her husband and friends had been waiting. I had borrowed a gyil from our next-door neighbors, and my housemates and the neighbors also came out to listen to Georgina's performance. Georgina played the gyil for her audience, with her husband accompanying her as a supporting player, and her friends dancing and signing in accordance with the appropriate style. I made a video recording of the entire performance, despite being aware of that our manufactured performance was not organic or customary. I was very glad to have met Georgina, and wanted to spend more time with her. When I asked her if she regularly played the gyil, she commented that, no, she did not have anyone to play with. I told her that I knew how to play the instrument, although not very well, but anytime she wanted to play, she could come and get me and I would be excited to play with her.

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[1] In Dagara culture, a woman is married into a man's family. She then also calls her husband's brothers her husband. Thus when a woman refers to her husband she can be referencing any of the husband's brothers or the husband himself. This also includes the male cousins of the husband, who are also considered brothers. In this case, Georgina brought with her to my house one of her husband's brothers. In Dagaraland, a woman is considered to be married to the entire family, not just to the man himself. Traditionally, if a man passes away his wife can be married by one of his younger brothers. Also, once a man has passed away, his widow will continue to live in his family's house to raise the children and help take care of the home.

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In this chapter I am going to present aspects of two Dagara female musicians' stories. Candida Kokum and Georgina Waabe's narratives are instructive in re-theorizing what constitutes resistant and transgressive action. Both of these women demonstrate that musical performance is a form of empowerment and an expansion of cultural norms. Their strategies of resistance are not based on oppositional reactions to oppressive structures, but are founded in community building, family building, resource sharing, and individual pleasure. Candida and Georgina's stories demonstrate the centrality of female-female social networking among Dagara women, and the transformative power of female performance spaces. I submit that by listening to how Dagara women speak about themselves and by viewing musical performance as a form of speaking, we can more fully understand the female body in performance as a political strategy. As I share Candida and Georgina's stories with you I am going to utilize a theoretical framework provided by African and postcolonial feminists. I will discuss how Dagara women's bodies are affected by the gendering of Dagara musical performance ideologies, practice, behavior, performance space, and dancing styles. Candida and Georgina's narratives show how they confront these cultural boundaries and create new cultural possibilities.

Although both women utilize many of the same strategies of resource and community building, and often share similar language with which to describe their relationship with the gyil, their differences are also productive in instructing us on how to theorize how individuals react to cultural codes. Georgina and Candida maintain different relationships to gyil performance practice and space, as well as to

their own gendered body, drawing into question essentialized notions of masculinity and femininity that operate among the Dagara. Although many facets of their lives are shaped by similar social conditions and life goals, they resist being categorized in homogenous or easily defined terms. In fact, their narratives describe the social conditions, challenges, and desires of many Dagara women, but also portray a highly nuanced, individualized reality. Chandra Talpade Mohanty urges postcolonialist feminist scholars to view women not as products of a social condition, but as actors within one.[2] In this way, Georgina and Candida represent agents who respond to often restrictive, patriarchal realities, but whose subjectivities are not comprised entirely of them.

In the time I spent listening to these stories, I was transformed by the capacity of both women to simultaneously empower themselves, women in their respective communities, and to reshape the configuration of the Dagara world. For me, they are emblematic as much as they are unique—they both define and reach beyond local realities to illustrate broader African feminist strategies, and indeed, transnational female networking possibilities. Although my background in African and postcolonial feminist literature provided me with a strong foundation through which to interpret my experiences in Dagaraland, I also was forced to reconcile my subject position as an outsider in their community, and wrestled with unintentionally reinforcing subject/object boundaries through conventional ethnographic methodologies. Although I entered the field with the intentions of

[2] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

conducting a feminist ethnography based on deconstructing power hierarchies between the researcher and the researched, I had to consistently and consciously monitor if and how my presence was effecting my relationships. Part of what emerges in this chapter is my conscious adoption of research methodologies that are centered around informal conversation and relationship building. I also had to learn new ways of listening that did not project my expectations of what constitutes resistant and political action. In opening myself up to forms of resistance that I had not previously considered, I became increasingly aware of operative transnational feminist agendas. Candida and Georgina's experiences are instructive in re-imagining the possibilities of a multi-valenced feminist project, in as much as they are re-writing local histories and subject positions.

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In Dagaraland, music is central to a wide range of lifecycle, social, and religious customs; it is located both in public and private performance spaces. Gyile are played in a wide spectrum of Dagara events, including funerals, seasonal festivals, religious ceremonies including Catholic Church services, recreational events, for entertainment, and at annual xylophone competitions. The gyil is pictured in figures 10-12 at a Catholic church wedding in Accra, a Catholic mass in Wa, and a funeral in Fielmua. This male-dominated musical instrument excludes women through a number of operative social taboos including an origin myth explicitly forbidding women to perform. The mythology surrounding the origins of the instrument is provided by Wiggins and Kobom:

A man was walking in the bush when we heard a fairy playing the xylophone. He was so fascinated by the music that he went home and called his friends to make preparations to go and catch the fairy. He knew it would be difficult as the fairy could only be controlled by people with special powers, not just ordinary men. The man went back into the bush with his friends and because he was so brave and strong he was able to catch the fairy. He then threatened to kill the fairy unless it showed him everything about making and playing a xylophone. The fairy told him he must first make a strong medicine using certain leaves. Next he must collect certain sticks, break them, then carve them (to make the bars). He must also find a special long calabash which grew by the river, cut it and put it into the water until the inside rotted, then hollow it out (to make the resonators). The man did everything he has told and gradually he learned all the secrets of making and playing a xylophone. The man then took an axe and killed the fairy and built a fire to roast the meat which he ate with his friends. When they took the xylophone home and started playing it the women were completely mystified by the music until the men told them to dance to it. But in spite of roasting the fairy, its blood remained part of the instrument, so the xylophone cannot be played by women because they menstruate and their blood would not mix with that of the fairy."[3]

Figure 10: Gyil players at wedding service. Nima, Ghana. August 2009.

[3] Trevor Wiggins and Joseph Kobom, Xylophone Music in Ghana (Crown Point, IN: White Cliffs Media Company, 1992), 3.

Figure 11: Gyil players at a Catholic Church service. Wa, Ghana. July 2008.

Figure 12: Dagara men playing gyile at a funeral. Fielmua, Ghana. July 2007.

Among the Dagara, the sexed body governs gender-appropriate behavior, gender roles, and gendered expressions. This is usually framed in terms of "man's work" and "woman's work." Women engage in prescribed activities and are restricted from others such as performance on the gyil, which is considered "man's work." As a primarily agricultural community, both men and women are responsible

for working in the family farm. Additionally, women's work includes taking care of the home, fetching water, cooking, cleaning, feeding children, and washing laundry. Even women who have careers outside of the home are expected to complete the tasks assigned to women. Women's work also includes professional occupations, including those that require training such as becoming a seamstress or hairdresser. Women without formal educations engage in frying and selling *sɛnsɛ*,[4] brewing *pito*, a fermented millet beer also called Dagara *dāā*, weaving baskets, selling produce or sundry items in the market. Women's work activities are pictured in Figures 13-15. It is unusual to see men doing women's work or women doing men's work—these boundaries are fairly codified, although not impermeable. Dagara men are also bound to cultural codes that shape their daily lives, although they are constrained differently. Gyil performance is regarded as man's work and thus belongs to the gendered domain of men.

[4] *Sɛnsɛ*, also called Kosi, are fried cakes made from ground bean flour.

Figure 13: Edith Kyile brewing Dagara *dāā* to sell at Fielmua market. April 2010.

Figure 14: Basket weaving. Kankan Doule, Ghana. April 2010.

Figure 15: Women fetching water. Kankan Duole, Ghana. April 2010.

Despite the gendered division of labor, some Dagara women do perform on the instrument, although there are considerably fewer female gyil performers than male. During my field research I worked closely with four female gyil players. Each of these women experienced social resistance differently, and their perspectives about the instrument and Dagara gender ideologies were varied. The reasons why more Dagara women do not play the gyil are not one-dimensional. Some women told me that if a woman wants to play, she will find it difficult to find a husband. Others added that a woman who plays the gyil will receive the most resistance from other women, not from the men. Another reason often cited is that according to the origin myth of the instrument, women who play the gyil will become infertile. I also heard that if you, as a Dagara woman approach the instrument, people will ridicule you and instruct you to stay with appropriate female activities.

Gyil performance practice is also gendered. To begin with, gyile are played while seated at a low stool; the performer sits in front of the gyil and plays with their hands between their legs. Dagara women wear skirts and dresses; when they play gyil they either have to wear trousers, alter their physical position to the instrument, or cover their laps with a cloth. As you can see in Figures 19 and 20, Candida wears trousers, while Georgina repositions her body to the instrument to keep her legs together. In fact, during my time in Fielmua, Georgina actually asked me for a pair of trousers so she could play the gyil more comfortably.

I never heard anyone directly reference gyil performance as having a masculine quality, however when I began to work with female gyil players several men commented to me that women could play, but not as well as the men. This was often the first question asked of me when I mentioned the research I was conducting in the area, "Can they play as well as the men?" This comparison indicates a valuation of male performance styles that are considered necessary for the efficacy of any event, whether social or ritual. However, through observation, I saw that individual performers maintained styles that were not linked to their sex.[5]

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In constructing my research project, I drew from scholarship that complicates simple notions of the relationship between the body, sex, and gender[6] as well as

[5] This point will be addressed more fully later in this chapter.

[6] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, [1990] 1999); Anne Fausto-Sterling, Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Judith Halberstam, Female Masculinity (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

works that have forged theoretical models of spatial gendering.[7] As Jane Sugarman notes writing about Prepsa Albanian weddings, "Any Prespa wedding may thus be seen as one point in an ongoing process through which community members actively constitute, reinscribe, challenge, or incrementally renegotiate the terms through which they are connected as a community."[8] Similarly, I theorized that Dagara individuals engage with, reinforce, reproduce, and subvert a shared set of signs through the performance of music and dance. Specifically, I believed that gyil performance, which is infused with deep Dagara signifiers of cultural authenticity and is linked to masculinity and the male body, is a site in which female performers critically address how they experience structures of gender. I expected Dagara female musicians to employ narratives of transgression and resistance.

As Georgina and I developed our friendship, and as I came to learn more about her experiences as a Dagara woman and a musician, I recognized the limited scope of my project. After our initial meeting and interview, she did not come to see me for several weeks. Disappointed and frustrated, I realized that by conducting a formal interview with a translator, I constructed boundaries around my role as researcher, and her role as research subject. I felt badly that in my excitement to meet her and learn what she had to say that I might have unintentionally replicated a power structure in which the agenda and frame of the project were mine, and I controlled topics of conversations, and the directions in which she was asked to

[7] Sylvia A. Nannyonga-Tamusuza, Baakisimba: Gender in the Music and Dance of the Baganda People of Uganda (New York: Routledge, 2005); Jane C. Sugarman, Engendering Song: Singing and Subjectivity at Prespa Albanian Weddings (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
[8] Jane C. Sugarman, Engendering Song: Singing and Subjectivity at Prespa Albanian Weddings (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 3.

speak. Listening to the recording of the interview now I can clearly demarcate moments in which she was trying to convey meanings to me which I was unable to hear, based on my desire to understand her experiences in certain ways or by listening only through my expectations and a limited vision of what constitutes the language of personal empowerment and community building.[9] I was certainly aware based on my academic training in postcolonial and African feminist studies that oppression, resistance, and transgression are not uniform concepts, nor do women respond uniformly to the systems in which they live. Nevertheless I found myself wanting to see a vision for Dagara women's actions that somehow resembled a certain way of articulating their experiences and responding to them. Furthermore, when Georgina played gyil at my home, I manufactured a performance context that was incongruent with those with which she was more familiar. I assumed that she would be comfortable performing in front of my friends and neighbors without considering what might have been a sharp distinction in her mind between public and private performance contexts. Although she did not specifically mention being uncomfortable with the scenario I created, the performance was one built around my terms and needs rather than her own. Georgina enriched her performance that day by bringing a supporting gyil player as well as three women who sang and dancing while she performed. By bringing these other participants, Georgina constructed a context that more closely resembled a Dagara performance space.

Retrospectively, I realize that my initial approach with Georgina was partially shaped by my first interaction with Candida Kokum, who was the first female gyil

[9] Later in this chapter I will discuss examples of the language Georgina utilized, and the meanings behind her speech that at the time I was not hearing fully.

player I met. Based on my experiences with her, the specific vocabulary that she and her friends used to describe their goals, the personal and political desires she articulated for herself and the women of her community, her performance style on the gyil, her relationship with the instrument, and how she embodied gendered performance, I anticipated that all female gyil players would utilize language and performance techniques that were similar.

I had traveled to the village of Tom located outside of Nandom, specifically to meet Candida, or Candy for short. My friend Joyce's family is from Tom, and she had told me many stories about her aunt, who plays the gyil. I was very eager to meet her, and so only a week after my initial arrival in Fielmua, Joyce and I took a trip to visit her family's house. Given the restrictions around gyil playing, and the gendering of Dagara performance spaces, ideologies, and practices, I was especially interested in how Candy came to learn the instrument, and how she experiences life as a female musician. Does she experience social resistance as I had heard female players would? Did she have trouble finding a husband as Rejoice had suggested? For whom does she play and when? Excited with the anticipation of learning more about the life of a female gyil player, I couldn't get to Tom fast enough. When we arrived, Joyce's family greeted us in the courtyard in front of the house. Her brothers had travelled to Kumasi for work, but their wives were in the yard with their children. After giving us water and offering us food, Joyce and I tired from the journey, took a nap on a mat in the shade of a tree. When we woke up, Joyce and I paid a visit to Candy's home. After meeting with her and exchanging greetings, we explained my interest in learning more about her life as a xylophone player. She

suggested that we return in the evening to ask her family for permission. As is customary, we returned that evening with a bottle of Schnapps as a gift for Candy's household. Joyce's uncle accompanied us, and spoke to the men of Candy's family about the project I wished to conduct. Although Candy's husband has passed away, a widow remains in her husband's family house, and it considered married to the family. It is her obligation to respect the men's position as family leaders and the maker's of public decisions. It would have been insulting to the family to meet with us without asking for their permission. The family agreed and Candy came to Joyce's uncle's home the following day to meet with me.

Candy's father was a gyil-mwiɛre, a xylophonist, and had nine male children, among which she was the only girl. All her brothers could play the gyil, and so she emulated their behavior and saw herself to be the same as they were. Her father never discouraged her playing, but rather it was her brothers who would beat her and try and prevent her from playing. But because she was stubborn, she told me, even their beatings could not deter her. Eventually her father told her brothers to leave her alone, that if she wanted to play the gyil, they should let her play.

Candy is the only Dagara female gyil player I met who sometimes performs publically. She mentioned that in Tom, as in other places in Dagaraland, after the harvest season is over and the dry season begins, most of the men migrate to Accra or Kumasi to find work.[10] Labor migration reduces the number of men available to play gyil at funerals, and so she plays in their stead. In addition to playing the gyil at

[10] In Dagaraland, there is only one harvest season, while in the south there are two. When the dry season sets in (November to March) there is very little work for the people of Dagaraland, and so the young men travel to the south to Kumasi and Accra to do migrant labor.

funerals Candy also "cries" with the men, meaning that she performs the male style of praise singing. Dagara funerals are characterized by performances on the gyil, accompanied by the kuɔr drum, and male praise singing of the deceased. The singing is in call and response form, with a soloist singing a line of text and the group of men surrounding the gyile responding with elongated wails and emphatic syllabic lines of “wo-o-ooo.” When I asked her about the reactions of the community, she said that it is mixed; some people call on her to come and join the men in singing and playing gyil, while others discourage her. She said that she mostly does it during times when the male gyil players are not available, and when they return she no longer plays. Several times, she mentioned that her talents of gyil playing and singing are “God’s gift to her” so she cannot simply not do it.

In addition to the gendering of ideological systems, Dagara performance spaces are also gendered, as illustrated through Candy’s public performance at funerals. When I asked other Dagara female musicians whether or not they would perform publically, all of them except Candy said they would not like to play in public. When I asked Candy if she would consider entering a public gyil competition, she said that she would not like to, as she feared male players would become jealous or harm her. This was a common response I heard from other female players--public performance opened them to opportunities for ridicule or abuse. Whether or not this took the form of physical, spiritual or other retribution was never made clear, and I did not hear of an example in which someone was ever directly threatened or harmed. I heard rumors about Dagara women performing at the annual Kakube xylophone competition in Nandom, although I never saw it myself. When I asked

Nandom Naa[11] what he knew about it, he told me that the only woman he knew that had performed at a competition was a white woman from England.[12] Similarly, when I attended the Kob-bine xylophone competition in Lawra, I spoke with the publicity director of the festival, A.S. Kalley. He told me about a white woman who had performed and won the competition many years ago, but he could not recall the performance of any Dagara women.[13] After I returned to the United States I was unable to return to Ghana for Fielmua's 2010 Kakur Bagr festival. During the course of the festival I received a phone call from a Dagara friend who told me that a Dagara woman from Burkina Faso was performing. He said that everyone loved it.[14]

By in large Dagara funerals are the most common public performance spaces. Female gyil performance at a funeral is especially uncharacteristic because it is a public space in which women do not typically perform on the gyil, and also because Dagara funerals are places in which men and women maintain separate activities, duties, and spaces. At a Dagara funeral, the gyile are placed together, and the men surround the gyil players in a circle. Those who are in mourning of a close relative stand in the front, nearest the gyile with rattan woven around their wrists. They hold out their palms face up, and people come and place coins in their open hands. People also toss coins near the xylophones to pay those who are performing. During the funeral, while the men surround the gyile, women alternatively stand in front of

[11] The chief of Nandom.

[12] He also made a point of noting that he invited this woman to often come and perform gyil in front of his palace so that people could see her playing Dagara music. Nandom Naa also mentioned that this woman played gyil at funerals on occasion.

[13] A.S. Kalley is referring to the performance of Valerie Naranjo at the Kob-bine festival in 1988.

[14] I am unable to make further comments at this time as to the reaction of people to her performance, the specifics of her life, or anything she has to contribute to this conversation. I plan on conducting further research on the subject at the nearest possible date.

the corpse, which has been placed atop a palanquin, and weep and sit together in shaded areas to drink Dagara *dāā*. Periodically, women will move through the men's circle to give coins. According to the Dagara, men and women mourn differently, so a woman's presence in the male space would disrupt the efficacy of the event. Men and women are also buried facing different directions. Men's corpses face the east because when they get up early and see the sun the go to the farm. Women's corpses face the west because when the sun is setting they see that they have to face the west to cook dinner for the family. Thus, their roles during life extend to their burial and after life.

If the person who has passed away is old, the funeral is also a cause of celebration of the person's life and people will dance bine. Both men and women maintain several styles of dancing bine, which takes place in lines. Men dance in lines together, and women dance in lines together. Women's dancing is characterized by alternating small shuffling steps, larger steps that raise their knees towards the chest, and small hops. They bend forward at the waist with a straight back and then raise and lower their chest while keeping the back straight and moving the bent elbows from side to side. Male dances range from keeping one's feet in place while moving the elbows and upper body side to side, to leaping high into the air while kicking out one's feet to the back and sides. Popular among older men is taking short steps forward with gently bent knees while raising a cane or closed umbrella into the air with one hand. Variation is common between women's and men's lines because value is placed on individual creativity and personal style.

Figure 16: Men dancing bine at funeral. Accra, Ghana. August 2009.

Figure 17: Women dancing bine at funeral. Kyetu, Ghana. July 2008.

Understanding that playing gyil, dancing, and singing at funerals are not only activities which are considered men's work, but that they take place in demarcated male spaces, I asked why Candy is permitted to be active by playing gyil and singing with the men. My previous inquiries revealed that Dagara women were not permitted to perform these activities or inhabit these spaces. But when I asked

Candy why she is allowed, she explained that because she knows how to do as the men are doing, that it is permissible. In other words, rather than standing among the men as a woman, she is embodying what the Dagara call "dɛbɛɛ yelle," or men's ways/customs.

Apart from her musical life, Candy says that she always does men's work. When her husband passed away, he left her with six children to take of, and so she has taken on his responsibilities in the farm and the home. So in addition to the work she does as a woman, she also is engaged in male work, which is how she characterizes gyil performance. Rather than indicate that she sees the gyil as also belonging to the women's domain, her perception is that she crosses over and participates in the male domain. She used the words "courage and bravery" several times to describe herself, and said that even though there are other women in the community who know how to play the gyil, they do not have the courage to play.

The social conditions of Dagara women in the area as well as their relationships to their husbands has a significant impact on women's activities and opportunities. Candy spoke openly about the relationship between many of the married men and women in Tom. What she told me resonated with what several women throughout the course of my time in the Fielmua also shared. Candy spoke about the difficulty of the conditions of life in the area. As a farming community, every family relies upon the harvest for food and for profits. After the harvest, it is the job of the men of the house to divide what the family will keep and eat, and what should be sold at the market. The men measure out the exact amount of bowls to be sold, so they know the exact profit that should return to the house. Candy told me

that many men do not give the women any capital once the crops have been sold, so they don't have any monetary control. If the husband is irresponsible or unkind, the women of the house will have nothing to spend at the market during the week on groceries. Often women complained about their husbands spending the money on alcohol while not giving them any "chop money"[15] or money for clothes or household items.

Like many women in Dagaraland, Candy went to school when she was very young. She went through Primary 2, which is roughly the equivalent in the United States to second grade. She stopped attending school because her father asked her to help him take care of his cattle. Candy mentioned that once a girl does not go to school that she would have little option other than to get married. Although the Dagara do not force marriage, nor do they arrange marriages, women are expected to get married when they are mature enough to do so. Candy was nineteen when she got married. Although girls who are students sometimes do drop out of school to get married, it is less likely, and most people do ask schoolgirls to marry them unless they also ask them to leave school. Candy commented that perhaps had she not been forced to leave school, that she would now be someplace "enjoying" instead of working as hard as she is forced to on the farm and in the village. During the conversation she turned to Joyce and said that it was a good thing that she was living in Accra, because had she been living in Tom, that the men would be coming and "worrying her," asking her to marry them. We laughed, but Candy added that if you refuse too many proposals that you open yourself up to potentially fatal harm.

[15] Money to purchase food.

This shocked me, and Candy added that you would be annoying them when they see you, and can very easily take retribution on you. Joyce is now 29, and still has not gotten married, although she has a baby daughter. Because she is not dowried her daughter still belongs to her family. Joyce frequently says that she only wants to work hard for herself and for her daughter, so that they can both have a good life. In Accra, single motherhood is more common and less looked down upon. Candy emphasized the importance of education as a means to open up possibilities for one's life, saying that out of all of her six children, it is only two that she doesn't have the money to send to school. She helps the other four financially to attend school so that, according to her, they will be prosperous.

The women's group that Candy began in Tom in 1987 is still functioning. The group's name is *Langtaa PɔgbƐ*, which means women who work together. The primary function of the group is to assess the needs of all the members, and to take action towards getting each of them what they need. Every week each member contributes 50 pesewas[16] into the common funds. By the end of the year they decide how to spend the money. This can include helping those women whose husbands will not give them money for new clothes or for their hair, or helping members to purchase household items or start small businesses. They also buy and sew clothes from the same cloth to publically demonstrate unity. At the end of the year around Christmas time, every member contributes one bowl of millet and they brew pito

[16] This is equivalent to around 50¢ in the United States.

and throw a party.[17] The group also discusses social issues such as how to raise money for their children's school fees, although Candy pointed out that not all of the women in the group were sending their children to school, and it was not up to the other women to convince them what is the correct behavior. Candy did point out that in Tom, the girls did not get married as young as many other places in Dagaraland, and she attributes this to the guidance provided by the women of the village who encourage their children to learn how to take care of themselves before they get married. Not only that, but they discuss the best course of action for children to take as to what will help them to be the most successful, and they advise each other on the best ways to talk to their children. This includes discussing family planning options. She mentioned that although there are many different families living in Tom, that all of the women "are one," that is, they work together as a collective unit. When any one of them is having a problem, they come together to help her solve the problem. When I asked if they got any resistance from community members, Candy laughed and told me a story. She said that at one point, the group was so successful that some of the men wanted to join. When they joined, they insisted that they take charge of the bankbook, and proceeded to squander all of the money. Candy was so outraged that she left the group. The group members begged her to come back, and returned her to her leadership role, including maintaining control over the books. I asked her directly about the relationships that were

[17] This type of activity is common to see around Christmas time when everyone is making some money from the season's harvest. Organized groups of women as well as groups of women from the same family will sew clothes from the same cloth to wear out into public to display their unity. These groups often brew pito and throw a party at one of the members' homes, or if they have the money they all go to the bar together to drink beer and eat meat. This is a special occasion celebration. Wearing the same cloth, even if it is not at a party is a sign of unity and indicates to the other community members an affiliation with the other members of the group.

formed between her and the other women in the group. She told me that those relationships that the women formed with each other were central to their lives; they act as friends, and as a support system. That more than the relationships they have with men, the relationships the women in the group have with each other are a source of great strength.

These female-female social networks can be productively viewed as a political strategy.[18] Not only are they relationships which provide economic resources in an area which offers limited opportunities for women with little or no formal education, they also serve as sources for information and emotional support. As Candy mentioned, and as the name of the group reflects, they are "as one;" any woman in the community who is having a problem shares this problem and finds support in the group. This illustrates that relationships between men and women, which are frequently cited as central to women's identity do not form the entirety of meaningful and significant relationships in African women's lives.[19] Furthermore, as the *Langtaa Pɔgbɛ* demonstrate, women are not working against men, but against the structures of society that restrict their movements.[20] Although at times, men might exemplify oppressive or restrictive behavior, as a community, women are not opposed to men, but are opposed to the constraints of a patriarchal society in an economically marginalized community.

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[18] Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994).
[19] Ibid.
[20] Obioma Nnaemeka discusses that often within African feminist paradigms women and men are working collectively against individualism in, "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 29 no.2 (2003): 257-385.

Candy invited the Langtaa *Pɔgbɛ* to come and meet me. I bought Dagara *dāā* for the group, and the women came wearing their matching clothes for our small party. Candy began to play the gyil and the women took turns dancing bewaa[21] and bine. Some of the men of the house heard the gyil and came out to dance as well. As the afternoon carried on, the women sang, danced, and drank, and the little girls came out to learn the dances. Some of the men began playing games and drinking while the women laughed and socialized with each other. When Candy stopped playing, a young man took over, and she joined in the dancing. At one point a line of men were dancing bine, and Candy got in line behind them and danced the male style with them. No one reacted to her joining the male dancers, her movements were as theirs were, and her body was fluent in their styles.

[21] Another genre of gyil music, commonly recognized to be less complex. This is a recreational style danced socially and during competitions, but never at funerals. Bewaa is characterized by a circular dance around the gyil; the movements of bewaa are stylized more so than bine. Each bewaa song has a dance pattern that accompanies it, although many of them are very similar. Bewaa dancing is recognizable for the manner in which during one section of the music, the women bend at the waist with a straight back and snap the middle of the back in and out while leaning over. While doing this they raise their hands towards their chest with bent elbows and hop quickly between their feet.

Figure 18: Candy and the *Langtaa Pɔgbɛ.*

Figure 19: Candy playing gyil in Tom, Ghana.

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After my experiences with Candy I mistakenly developed a preconceived notion about what Dagara women's lives would look like and how they would talk about themselves. When I interviewed Georgina I made the mistake of expecting her to be more similar to Candy; this was based on assumptions that Dagara female gyil players would have identical outlooks on both their contributions and hardships. Because of these assumptions I nearly missed getting to know the most amazing woman I met during my time in Fielmua. I am lucky that I was given an opportunity to correct my arrogant mistakes, and that she was open enough to let me become her friend. After the interview, when she didn't come to visit me I knew I had to take another approach. My fieldwork methodology was based on developing relationships, and if I wanted to understand the experiences of Dagara female gyil players I would have to put away my questions and find a way to create human connections that did not demarcate boundaries and reinforce differences. I began to visit Georgina at her work place in the market, sitting with her while she made her cakes, and talking with her. As my Dagara language improved, our relationship deepened. I shared with her the details about my family and friends, my home, my work, and I asked her about herself. One day she came to my house and asked me if I would like to play the gyil with her. We went to her brother's house, where we spent the afternoon playing together.

After that, she and I frequently played the gyil together at her brother's house. Sometimes the other women in the family would come out and dance, and they would show me the stylistic variations for dancing bine and bewaa. I think it

was amusing for the family to see me play the gyil and dance bewaa, but those were instructive and happy moments for me. I enjoyed being with the women of the family, and observing the relationships between Georgina and her brother's wives[22] and children. I liked listening to what the women spoke about and who they spoke about. It is customary to greet everyone in the house upon arrival, and frequently when we came the women would be sitting in the shade of one or another of the trees surrounding the yard. Sometimes they would be drinking Dagara *dāā*, other times they would be plaiting each other's hair. While Georgina and I played, usually one of her nephew's would come and join us. The other children would gather around and watch, and would collapse in laughter if I got up to dance.

When two people are playing the gyil together, if there is only one instrument rather than two, they sit side by side. Both bine and bewaa are comprised of a melodic line and a supporting rhythmic accompaniment performed on the lowest bars of the gyil. The supporting player reverses their mallets and strikes the bars with the wooden, rather than the rubber end of the mallet. This rhythmic line, known as *kpagru,* provides a timeline function. This is illustrated in Figures 19 and 20. In Figure 19, while Candy plays gyil, she is supported by a man

[22] In Dagara culture, when your brother takes a wife, she is also considered to be your wife. She is thus married to the family; although this is often referred to jokingly. Several times I heard a female relative, either a cousin or a direct sister refer to their brother's wife as "my wife," or make a comment such as "we bought you" which teases at the dowry system. These statements are not meant literally, but are poking fun at the family structure. Both men and women in a family, thus refer to the brother's wife as "n pɔg," my wife. The relationship between brothers and male cousins (although there is no Dagara word for cousin) and their wives is not only joking, but refers to an aspect of traditional marital practices. If a man dies, any one of his younger brothers can marry that woman. See Sidonia Alenuma, "The Dagaare-Speaking Communities of West Africa," Journal of Dagaare Studies 2 (2002): 5, for more on the joking relationships in kinship structures of the Dagara/Dagaaba. Children of siblings are also referred to as your children, rather than nieces or nephews.

playing kpagru on the low register of the instrument. In Figure 20, Georgina is shown playing kpagru while her brother's son plays bine on the gyil.

When Georgina and I played gyil together we would take turns playing the supporting line for each other. Georgina's repertoire and performance capabilities far exceeded my own, and so I most commonly supported her with the kpagru line. When it was my turn to play the melodic line, Georgina would identify the song I was playing and sing along. If I was making a number of mistakes, she would tap out the melody for me slowly, helping me to improve my performance. As we sat there together playing the gyil, the women in the family would move between dancing and completing their work. It was usually just before sunset that we would play together. Georgina always had work to do during the day, and would come and get me before she had to return to her home to prepare the evening meal and complete the day's work. So as we were playing the women in the family were beginning to stir their T.Z. and cook their okra soup.[23] So, as we were playing, the women in the family were preparing their evening meal, bathing their children, and fetching water; in other words, those performances took place within the context of women's spaces and woven into the fabric of women's work.

Up until that time, I could never dance bine, which bothered me because this is the most popular Dagara dance; it is danced at funerals, and all types of social functions. Someone once told me that bewaa is for fun, but that bine is Dagara culture. Every time I saw women dancing bine, I would intently watch their feet, but could never quite pick up the steps in relation to the xylophones. Georgina is known

[23] T.Z. (pronounced tee-zed) is how people commonly refer to tuo-zaafe, the most common meal in Dagaraland. It is ground millet flour stirred into a hard paste and usually eaten with okra soup.

around town for her excellent dancing, and I took the opportunity to ask her to show me to dance bine. She did, and while initially I entertained the household with my inept imitations of Georgina's feet, eventually I got it well enough to dance in public (although never well enough not to inspire laughter).

I continued to visit Georgina in her workplace, and she began visiting me in my home, and invited me to visit her husband's home. Georgina explained to me that she began playing as a child, because her father played the xylophone, as do her brothers. She describes herself as being drawn to the instrument, which resonates with the Dagara concept of being "born with the gyil," which refers to a person's natural ability to play, a special connection between the person and the instrument that most do not possess. The men in her family did not discourage her playing, although she is aware that playing the gyil is a male-dominated musical activity.

In Dagaraland, when a woman gets married, she moves from her family's house into her husband's family house. The Dagara people practice an extended family system, which includes polygamy. Family homes are large structures that are occupied by all the male family members and their wives and children. The women who live in the house together are co-wives, sisters-in-law, mothers, daughters, grandmothers, and sisters. When Georgina was married, the other women in the house discouraged her from playing the gyil, telling her that it's men's work and that she shouldn't play. Additionally, Georgina has seven children, and is responsible for raising enough money to feed her family, and to pay for school fees and clothing. She works in the town market making *sɛnsɛ*, fried cakes made from ground bean flour.

Between her personal work and the family work in the home and the farm, her time is very limited.

I asked her why despite the negative reactions from the women in her husband's family she continued to play the gyil. She told me that it was a source of pleasure and joy for her, that when she couldn't play she thought about it, and missed it. When I asked her if she ever performed in public she reacted strongly, telling me that she would not consider it.

Figure 20: Georgina playing gyil at her brother's home. Fielmua. December 2009.

One Sunday, Georgina invited me to join her at her church service. She is a member of the Pentecostal Church; I knew that she was a very active member, and that her religion was central to her identity. I accepted her invitation because I wanted to know more about those things that are important to her. During the course of the service I noticed that Georgina was an active song leader in her church. The congregation was very welcoming and I was invited to introduce myself to the members and mention why I had come to join their service. I said that I came because Georgina is my friend and she had invited me to see what her religious life is like. After the service, I was chatting with the pastor, who asked me how I knew Georgina. I said that I was interesting in learning more about female gyil players. He was shocked, and said that he never knew she played the gyil.

After that, I went with Georgina to church on occasion, and began to notice more and more that she had a leadership role in her religious community. In May, Georgina told me that she had been invited to give a lecture at a church in Piina, outside of Lambussie, and asked me if I would be willing to give her a ride on my motorcycle. We went to Piina to attend a Pentecostal service being held at one of the schools. In the middle of the service the pastor introduced Georgina and asked her to speak to the congregation. She said that she wanted to first introduce herself by singing a song, and then continued to give a lecture on marital discourse. She spoke about the best ways to mend relationships problems between husbands and wives, saying that no matter what problems the other person brings to you, you must always act out of love. Georgina's husband did not attend school, and had no income outside of his farming. Georgina told me that he had a problem with alcoholism, and

she spoke about this to the congregation. She said that if your husband is weak, that you, as the wife, must be even stronger and take care of him. She went on to say that if he should come home drunk, that you should treat him with kindness and love and help him to bath himself, to feed him, and to pray for him. Georgina told the congregation that beginning arguments will not solve any problems; it is better to pray for his strength and to do what you need to do to keep your family strong. I was moved by her strength and her kindness, her patience, her ability to keep her values in mind even in difficult times, and her deep love for her husband.

When I asked Georgina about "what it means to be a Dagara woman in Fielmua" she replied, that her biggest problem was how to get money to eat and to feed her children. I considered her answer, and thought to myself that this did not seem like an answer that would be unique to women, and so I tried again, asking her to tell me specifically what the problems were for women. Again, she clarified further that as a woman without a formal education, it is very difficult to find work to do outside of the farm, and so there are no opportunities to make money and take care of your family. She said that women in Dagaraland "suffer in the farms" and then "suffer during the harvest" and when they go to the market to sell their good, their husbands measure the exact number of bowls to be sold, and when they come back to the house their husbands collect all the money from them, and then they have no money of their own. After this, if the food in the house runs out, it is the woman's responsibility to find money to feed the family. She mentioned that this behavior was frustrating, and she asked her husband not to do this anymore, but he told her that a woman cannot tell him what to do, and all the men are doing this, and

so he too, will continue to behave in this fashion. I asked her what she would do if the food ran out in the house, how she would feed her family. She told me that you could do work for people who still had food, and that they would give you some. I asked Georgina what advice she offers to her daughters, or what advice she will offer to them when they get older to help them be strong in these situations. Georgina replied that the best thing for her daughters to know is that they have to find a way to take care of themselves before they get married, that they should not have boyfriends when they are too young, because if they get pregnant they will need to get married, and they will not have any resources of their own. The best possible option is for the girls to go to school and to have an education, so that if they work, they will have money of their own and will not have to be dependent on their husbands. She re-emphasized education as the key for her children because once you have an education if would be more difficult for anyone to take control over you. Once you have some education, you can have your own job, and you will be able to buy your own things, buy your own clothes, buy your own food, and you will not allow anyone to force you to "sit in the house all day, or only to work in the farm." After she told me what she hoped for her children, I asked her how she herself found strength on a daily basis. It is too late for her to attend school, and she is already married and is responsible for taking care of her family. She said that for her, she finds strength in God and in her church community. Whenever she is having a problem she goes to the church elders or the pastor, or the pastor's wife, and they advise her, and she follows their guidance.

On the day before Easter I went with Georgina to her church service and observed the type of advice that she is referring to here. It was the Pastor's wife who spoke during the service about the lives of women in the community. She said that she saw that women in their community were often having a problem with their husbands. She said that she saw the husbands of many of the members "friending" other girls, and that they were not having sexual relationships with their husbands, as they should be. She made a joke about the women going to bed with "too many clothes on" so that their husbands could not have sex with them, and she asked the women why they were doing this. One woman stood up and said that she was sleeping with her husband and became pregnant, and she suffered with the pregnancy and gave birth and since she gave birth, that the husband is not taking care of her the way he used to before she became pregnant. So she did not want to risk becoming pregnant again, because it will compound the situation. To this the pastor's wife replied, that marriage is a two-way street. Many times before a woman gives birth, the husband is very kind and giving to the woman, he offers her gifts, and gives her money to buy cloth, and other things. But later, he stops and gives this affection to another woman. But it is also the responsibility of the wife to try to keep the husband's attention by taking care of herself, making sure she dresses beautifully and is affectionate to her husband, which includes having a sexual relationship with him. She advised the women that if their husband are beginning to take girlfriends that they should talk with him, and try to be kind and loving and understand his feelings and his needs, and to maintain a strong connection between them. She then added that it is the responsibility of men to take care of their wives

by providing them with what they need to take care of themselves, so that they will continue to find them attractive and will not be tempted by other women.

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In considering Georgina and Candy's perspectives on the operative nature of Dagara gender ideologies, and how they verbalized their experiences women and musicians, I was forced to reconsider the frame of my project. I had expected female gyil performance to be the site of resistance and transgression, and it is, but not in the way I thought it would be. Neither Candy nor Georgina verbally articulated gyil performance as a political strategy but rather as "God's gift" and as a source of joy and personal pleasure. They opened my eyes to more expansive possibilities of what constitutes political action.

Gyil performance is deeply imbued with Dagara signifiers of ethnicity, group history, and shared values. As a male-dominated musical instrument, which is most frequently performed in the context of a male space, the performance by Dagara women demonstrates how gender is negotiated. Female gyil performance becomes a heightened gendered performance space, as well as a place for the renegotiation of ethnic identities. Through performance, Dagara women challenge the gender ideologies they move within while actively reshaping contemporary Dagara narratives. They call attention to who gets to mobilize narratives of cultural authenticity at the same time they re-define what that means.

Georgina never expressed to me any unhappiness about not playing gyil publically. She is not contending with the valuation placed on the public sphere, or

the lack of value attributed to the private sphere. While I heard male gyil players comment that women could never play in public, Georgina's intent was not to overturn an order that prevents her from acting in public. In fact, to presume that a woman's power in the private sphere is less valuable because she lacks power in the public sphere relies upon assumptions about the concerns and goals of Dagara women. In the times we played gyil together at her brother's home, and the women in the family came to sing and dance, those connections were formed and enjoyed in a private home. Furthermore, by performing in the private sphere, which takes place around other Dagara women, she demonstrates the capacity of relationships between women to become a source of pleasure and power.

Candy's experiences as a musician were somewhat different. For her, she sees herself as performing male work, musical and otherwise. She is able to perform on the gyil in a public male space as well as sing with the men, and dance the male style of bine. She commented that because she does these things as they do, she is able to do this. Her experiences demonstrate that Dagara women negotiate the terms of their sexed bodies through musical performance.

Candy's women's group, and Georgina's family women both exemplify different aspects of resource building. The *Langtaa Pɔgbɛ,* are a formalized example of female-female social networking strategies that provide economic resources in an area which offers limited opportunities for women with little or no formal education. They also serve as a source of information and emotional support. As Candy mentioned, and as the name of the group reflects, they are "as one;" any woman in the community who is having a problem shares this problem and finds

support in the group. Georgina's family women exemplify another aspect to strategy building—family building and resource sharing. Women in a family often act in cooperative ways such as helping with farm labor, sharing food, and taking care of each other's children. By working together to develop resources, these women experience mutual benefits. Both Georgina and Candy's emphasis on female-female relationships illustrates that the relationships between men and women, which are frequently cited as central to women's identity do not form the entirety of meaningful and significant relationships in African women's lives.

Georgina's desire to experience pleasure through gyil performance, and her valuation of the private sphere are instructive in re-theorizing the possibilities of transgression and resistance. Her experiences indicate that rather than being directed outward, in reacting to and against others, that resistance is in acting. This does not negate the significance of her actions, their impact, or her capacity to transgress. Through gyil performance, Georgina creates possibilities for other Dagara women, even as she redefines the terms through which she is perceived. According to Linda Alcoff, every subject position is actually a web of subject positions—therefore every time we act and speak we create spaces into which others may also act and speak.[24] Georgina's response to restrictive voices is not to oppose, but to continue to act out of her personal needs and desires, out of the experiences that resonate with her, regardless of the gender or racialized ideologies mapped on her sexed body. By doing so, she creates a space into which other Dagara women may also act.

[24] Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* no.20 (Winter 1991-92): 5-32.

I am often asked if female gyil players form a social network. All of the women I know who play gyil did not have any female friends who play the gyil. The last female gyil player I met is a young girl named Augusta from Cheboggo, a village located outside of Fielmua. When I met Augusta, I asked her if she would be willing to talk with me and to perhaps play the gyil with me. She agreed and took me to her father's house. When we arrived, we discovered that the gyil they had in the house was broken. I told her that I knew another place that we could go. I brought her to Georgina's brother's house and introduced her to the family. Georgina was not there, but I told her that my friend Georgina also plays the gyil, and that this was her family's home. Augusta and I were playing the gyil when one of Georgina's brother's sons arrived home from school. He had often played with Georgina and me, and was happy to see us. I introduced them, and he sat down to play with Augusta. They played for quite a while, taking turns accompanying each other. After some time, Augusta said that she needed to go home, and we said goodbye to the family. She was invited to come back to play gyil again anytime, and to come and meet Georgina.

●ALEXIS●

"Can a Dagao wear a smock in a European winter?"
–Dr. Alexis Nang-beifubah

"Why is equality only for white women?"
–Mrs. C. A. Bob-Milliar

"A genuine feminist politics always brings us from bondage to freedom, from lovelessness to loving...There can be no love without justice."
–bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*

I met Dr. Alexis Nang-beifubah in September 2009 when I was hospitalized in Wa with a case of malaria. It was an unusual and unfortunate beginning to a friendship, but knowing Alexis became a highlight for the remainder of my fieldwork. He and I enjoyed long conversations about religion, health care, gender relations, Dagara culture, world events, and politics. We had wonderful disagreements, spending hours debating. Because of his position, Alexis has a very high status in the community. Alexis grew up in Piina, a small town close to Fielmua. He is well known throughout the area, and in the diasporic Dagara communities. He told me that because of his status people often feel uncomfortable disagreeing with him, or openly challenging him, and he appreciated the informality of our friendship.

Up until that point, all of the well-educated Dagara men I knew spoke of the importance of maintaining Dagara tradition. In fact, members of the class of educated elite men were more likely to reference traditional Dagara ideologies as

apposite to Western culture[1] than the men I had met in the villages. Although, in the villages and small towns it was common to hear circulating rumors about Western culture and people. Alexis illuminated for me another side to Dagara culture; he studied in England and the United States, and routinely travels internationally for professional conferences. Without regarding ethnicity as irrelevant to the construction of his identity, he does not view it as central to how he lives his life. For example, his wife is not Dagara, which is uncommon among most well educated Dagara men. During one of our earliest times together he said to me, "Can a Dagao[2] wear a smock[3] in a European winter?" By this he meant that individuals have the ability to move in and out of cultural parameters by responding to their individual desires as well as social norms. Furthermore, the expectation that traditional practices are always and unquestionably preferable is also restrictive. In the same conversation he told me that he doesn't wear a suit and tie, for example, because it is Western, but because he likes the way he looks. He wants to travel the world and

[1] There is a conflation of Western cultures in this context. People do not refer to American culture as different from any European cultures unless they have traveled abroad or are well acquainted with people from European countries or America. Most commonly, all Euro-Americans are referred to as "white." This term actually points to outsider-ness rather than a racial category. In the border towns a distinction is drawn between all English-speaking peoples and the French, who were the colonial power in neighboring Burkina Faso. In Dagaraland, people refer to "white" people as *nasala*, *nasapula*, or *nasapɔg* (for a woman). The prefix nasa- is commonly translated as white, but literally means outsider/stranger. The term for English is *nasakɔkɔr*, which is linked to the former colonial power, Britain. Therefore all "outsiders" are assumed to be British, and labeled as such. There is no distinction between being Western and being white.

[2] The ethnic group Dagara can be subdivided into localized ethnicities and language dialects. The northernmost Dagara people speak Dagara, and one person is Dagara. The ethnic group in central Dagaraland, around the major town Jirapa is referred to as Dagaaba, the language they speak is Dagaare, and one person is a Dagao. It is common for most people to interchange these terms. The Dagaaba are more centrally located, and Dagaare is the official language of all of the people who identify as Dagara/Dagaaba. It is an official written language and is taught in schools in Dagaraland, which the northernmost dialect, spoken in Fielmua and Nandom, is not.

[3] A smock is the term for the Dagara-style men's shirt. Most smocks are sleeveless or short-sleeved and open on the sides. Alexis's exact point is that a typical European winter is very cold, and the smock would not provide sufficient warmth.

interact with people and be able to express himself freely. Why should he contain himself to only "African" ways of being? And does his use of "Western" clothing/behavior/lifestyle make him less of an African? In this chapter, I explore the mobilization of concepts of tradition and modernity in the context of Dagaraland, while investigating the power dynamics inherent in such constructions. I show how Dagara individuals' self-identification is based upon more complex realities than the limited categories provided through commonly used terms such as tradition or modern. I also demonstrate how in many cases the conflation of modern with European is racialized in order to further ingrain concepts of insider and outsider. This tactic, which is not equally applied to all bodies, is also a gendered and class-based discourse, as those without access to the local power structure do not have the opportunity to determine which behaviors, actions, and emotional and intellectual desires are considered transgressive. By utilizing a postcolonial theoretical perspective, I provide a lens with which to view Dagara actors that more closely resembles the actuality of lived experience in Dagaraland. I demonstrate how the rigid demarcations between the traditional and modern are incongruous with state policies on gender, and show the challenges confronted by those actively working to address gender inequality and power imbalance. Finally, questioning the application of the concept of cultural authenticity as a regulatory device, I offer evidence provided by Dagara men and women who are actively re-writing cultural possibilities and thus resisting definition through narrowly defined terms. I submit that by refusing to be contained within constrictive categories of belonging, Dagara

men and women provide a new perspective on the connection between local and transnational political strategies.

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Although we were speaking about clothing, Alexis's statements point to broader concepts of how Africans define themselves, and how the categories through which we define ourselves are often constrictive. Africans living in a postcolonial state are not confined to "African" ways of being; their daily experiences, as well as the broad categories which define their realities are a bricolage drawn from African, Western, and global signs.[4] Kofi Agawu writes that postcolonialty does not refer to a hybrid African-Western way of being, but rather that Africans determine at which moments to draw from the various signs they are exposed to.[5] These signs are no longer Western as they are filtered through African sensibilities, and are re-imagined to suite African lifeways.[6] Thus, Alexis's interpretation of his own life, and his ability to pick and choose the behaviors, clothing, and lifestyle choices that please him are an illustration of cosmopolitanism.[7] Turino points out that "cosmopolitan cultural formations" are at once "local and translocal" because each locality produces a different interpretation of a global sign based on "specific conditions and histories."[8]

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[4] Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
[5] Ibid.
[6] Thomas Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., 7-8.

Alexis is not imitating Western attitudes or styles, he has internalized global signs, based on exposure, education, and his imagination of his Self.

An example of how this cosmopolitanism plays out in his positions on social issues is provided in his thoughts on health care. Alexis and I often spoke about health care practices that are illegal in Ghana, but which are practiced, such as female excision and abortion. In one of our earliest meetings Alexis and I were out with a subordinate colleague of his, a man who was around my age. As we discussed female excision, he told me that he would never allow this to happen to any of his daughters, and the other man agreed. After having read much scholarship on this debate from multiple perspectives, I was eager not to dismiss the practice entirely.[9] Alexis wholly disagreed with me, and continued to explain the health risks involved. To him, my theoretical position was useless from a practical standpoint. I supported my position with postcolonial and African feminist theory that supports female excision, views it as a resistant form, and rejects viewing African cultural practices through a Western lens. Unmoved, he said that it was ridiculous to reject a theoretical model simply because it was Western in origin. The "cultural" value of this practice, to him was not evenly weighed against the serious risks.

The other side of this debate is provided from postcolonial and African feminist scholars who have noted the importance of not dismissing African cultural practices without fully considering the local circumstances through which African

[9] Obioma Nnaemeka, *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2005); Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, "Alice in Motherland: Reading Alice Walker on Africa and Screening the Color 'Black,'" in *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood*, ed. Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), 159-185; Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (New York: Pocket Books, 1992); Ibid., *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1993).

women construct themselves as subjects, and through which they experience their realities.[10] Western perspectives of female excision have been called imperialist, racist, and neocolonialist. Chima Korieh writes:

> The worldwide debate on female circumcision has come under increasing scrutiny partly because it is fuelled by feminist discourses that position the West as the arbiter of cultural values and meanings. Western feminist discourses on female circumcision have produced powerful images of African and Middle Eastern societies. The images, embedded in a salvationist and liberationist message, describe female circumcision as emblematic of a backward and uncivilized society. A critique of these discourses has become evident as scholars and other commentators break out of the binary construct of the West/The Rest of Us or the civilized/uncivilized confinements of Eurocentric literature and knowledge production. In the ongoing debate about female circumcision, in particular, it has meant looking critically at Western feminism in its continued privileging of Western cultural ideas and practices. It has also meant looking critically at the salvationist agenda of Western feminism and its mission of speaking across differences of race, gender, sexuality, and cultures.[11]

Another side to this discussion, supported by opinions such as Alexis's, is a critique of not addressing damaging or oppressive cultural practices, or ignoring human rights violations without considering the potentially dangerous effects for women whose bodies are at stake.[12] There must be a balance between the imperative to reject the distortion of Western theories and privilege indigenous ways of being, with the potential damage of idealizing all indigenous cultural

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[10] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Obioma Nnaemeka, "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29 no.2 (2003): 257-385; Obioma Nnaemeka, ed, *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2005); Obioma Nnaemeka, ed, *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998); Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003); Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[11] Chima Korieh, "'Other Bodies:' Western Feminism, Race, and Representation in Female Circumcision Discourse," in *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses,* ed. Obioma Nnaemeka. (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2005), 111.

[12] Andrea Cornwall, "Introduction: Perspectives on Gender in Africa," in *Readings in Gender in Africa,* ed. Andrea Cornwall. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

practices. Evocations of the "traditional" can be homogenizing as well. Idealizing an African past or "traditions" does not always empower women, but can possibly reinforce structures that serve to limit women's choices, agency, and opportunities. According to Imam,[13] "resorting to versions of 'traditional' culture in defense of an 'essential Africanity' leaves African women without the political resources to combat those very aspects of tradition that damage them as women."[14] Nnaemeka similarly points out that the "unexamined exaggeration of gender complementarity masks real and insidious gender inequalities and conflicts, particularly in racist and imperialist contexts."[15]

Alexis considers female excision, or as he called it, female genital mutilation, to be a human rights violation, and does not consider his position to be racist, colonialist, or imperialist. Nor did he consider reviewing his position for fear of being aligned with the "Western" perspective. I would later have a similar conversation with the Regional Director of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, Mrs. C.A. Bob-Milliar, who took the same position as Alexis. When I mentioned the African feminist theory that supports this practice, she waved it off, saying that this was not a practical solution to a serious human rights violation. Both of these individuals are Dagara; they were raised in northern Dagaraland, Alexis in Piina, and Mrs. Bob-Milliar in Nandom. Their perspectives are unequivocally African

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[13] Ayesha Imam, "Engendering African Social Sciences: An Introductory Essay," in *Engendering African Social Sciences*, ed. Ayesha Imam, Amina Mama, and Fatou Sow. (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997).
[14] Andrea Cornwall, "Introduction: Perspectives on Gender in Africa," in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 4.
[15] Obioma Nnaemeka, "Mapping African Feminisms," in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 39.

and are drawn from a range of theoretical positions, some of which have been constructed as "Western."

The position adopted by these two individuals regarding female excision is also the position adopted by the State. Both Dr. Nang-beifubah and Mrs. Bob-Milliar are Regional Directors of government ministries, therefore they are employed to implement government policy and are well versed in government rhetoric. This does not indicate that they do not intellectually and emotionally support their positions, but that State rhetoric and policy are not neutral. The international community has established positions, reflected in policies, on human rights standards and violations. The nation-state Ghana is required to adhere to these international standards in order to maintain a positive relationship with the international community, which directly affects Ghana's eligibility to receive financial aid, political aid, and to benefit from programs such as the United States Peace Corps, which is very active in Ghana. Furthermore, international NGOs require accountability of funds provided, which includes the caveat that money be spent precisely according to the mission of each specific NGO. Even local NGOs are modeled upon the structures provided by international NGOs. Ultimately policies are developed which adhere to the guidelines that allow for continued support from governmental and non-governmental agencies.

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A criticism frequently lobbed at individuals who position themselves in such a way as to align theoretically with "Western" perspectives on gendered and sexual

ideologies is that they are replacing traditional cultural values with Western standards. These criticisms primarily come from the class of educated-elite men who have constructed an agenda that requires the maintenance of "traditional" values and practices. It is here that the binary between traditional and modern arises; tradition and cultural authenticity are aligned with Africa and modernity is aligned with the West. Those who reference the dichotomy, and mobilize the "traditional" as apposite to Western cultures do so with intent. This intent relies upon the binary structure to dismiss "Western" ideologies as threatening when the "traditional" values in question reinforce existent power hierarchies. Not all "Western" standards, practices, behaviors, and values are considered opposite to Dagara cultural values. For example, the desire to participate in a global capitalist economy is not referred to as anti-traditional. This reinforces the idea that those who demarcate boundaries around which practices are apposite to tradition do so intentionally to regulate undesirable behaviors and attitudes.

Specifically, Dagara gender and sexual ideologies have been placed on the "traditional" side of the dichotomy in order to reinforce the existent power hierarchy and maintain control of women's bodies through ideological parameters. I recently received an email from an acquaintance in Ghana, Lambert Faabeluon. Lambert is from Fielmua, but is now working for the Environmental Protection Agency in Tema. He has a master's degree in toxicology, and is currently working towards his Ph.D in environmental law. During my time in Fielmua, I only interacted with Lambert on occasion because he resides in Tema, but I became close friends with his sister, Faustie. Faustie is now in her second marriage; during her first

marriage her husband was physically abusive and she was unable to remain in his house. She was forced to leave her daughter behind, because under patrilineal systems of customary law, if a marriage is broken, the children belong to the husband's extended family. If he desires, the husband usually acquires custody of the children. Although this was a difficult decision for her, she told me that she knows that eventually her daughter will grow up and they will reestablish a relationship; as she put it: "girls will always come for their mothers." In the course of my email exchange with Lambert I received an email in which he discusses his perspective on the treatment of women in Dagaraland:

Hi Sidra, thanks for your prompt reply and for showing the understanding and preparedness to assisting me and my like colleagues from a neutral standpoint to effect social change in Fielmua particularly gender issues. Growing up, i pittied [sic] my mother throughout her existence and tried when it was ok to make life a bit confortable [sic] but it has not been easy for me because my mother is deep rooted in certain beliefs that discursions around some topics are no go areas.

Luckily for me, I have made some change in the life of Faustie after the former husband repeatedly abused her like a beast. Today, she is my symbol of positive change and that I have empowered economically to enable her gain some respectability and can make decisions of her own and stand by them. I am also closely monitoring the relationship between her and her current husband to ensure her liberties are guaranteed.

Over the years, i have housed and trained six girls giving them some economic leverage for their survival and currently, there are four of them here together with my two daughters under my care. You know, change is the only thing very very difficult to effect and it is so because our male dominate the females and gender empowerment threatens their authority, power and economic control. Hence, they use the most rudimentary cultural/traditional beliefs to put fear in girls at the very tender age to accept the dominance of the male in all aspects of their lives and will fight any form of empowerment that will free the girls/women from the male dominance (women enlightenment is therefore

regarded as western and hence foreign.) Any girl who wants to fight for her rights is regarded as a bad girl, prostitute or has no respect for traditions and all means are employed to "bring you down". Women to the males in Fielmua as I experienced with my mother, are sex partners, baby factories and farm labourers; all very denigrating circumstances.

It has been very hard for me and my colleagues to introduce and continue with Kukurbagr [the annual xylophone festival] as a means to changing the status quo of the men to respect their daughters, aunties, sisters to be able to respect other peoples sisters, daughters and aunties they are keeping as their wives. The multiple wifing is has come a long way and many young men will prefer one even though they flirt outside. The festival has achieved some gains in that but it is too little for our liking and the pace of the change is too slow…

Lambert Faabeluon
Director
Environmental Protection Agency
Accra East, Tema[16]

As Lambert's email illustrates, in Dagaraland, the restriction of certain behaviors or gendered expressions tends to be couched in the language of tradition and culture, as in "In Dagara tradition, women don't do that." Likewise, prescribed actions, gendered roles, and gendered expressions are referred to as traditional. Here, concepts of culture and tradition become ahistoricized; they appear as a homogenized set of indisputable codes that are applied equally to all bodies. Concepts of tradition are not, however, uniformly applied and not everyone has equal access in referring to them.

[16] Personal communication with Lambert Faabeluon.

In the context of Africa, the trope of tradition has been used to construct differences between Western modernity and African-ness.[17] The traditional has come to symbolize the rural, the pure, or the authentic African expressions, those that have not come into contact with the West, or which are informed by the urban. Providing a counter-argument to this vision of the traditional, Veit Erlmann writes:

> Traditions are not given historical facts that are handed down, as the commonplace label has it, from time immemorial. Tradition has little do with the persistence of old forms, but more with the ways in which forms and values are linked together… Cultural traditions are socially constructed arrangements of behavior that can be reinterpreted, developed, or even, 'invented'; they are continually constituted in social practice.[18]

He continues, "Tradition, then, serves to create images of social reality and to construct a discourse that *reflects the position of those who refer to it rather than what they refer to* [my emphasis]."[19] These insights are demonstrated in Lambert's email as well. In the case of Dagara gender ideologies, how "tradition" is referenced illustrates the position of those who mobilize the term, and what positions of power are at stake.

Dagara women repeatedly told me that when they act to challenge static notions of tradition or culture, they are accused of "behaving like white women." I believe this serves as a mechanism to regulate the female body and dismiss "outside" behaviors by referencing ahistoric cultural codes and racializing gendered actions. What does it mean to "behave like a white woman?" This statement is

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[17] Kofi Agawu, Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions (New York: Routledge, 2003).
[18] Veit Erlmann, African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 11.
[19] Ibid.

diffuse because it doesn't refer to a specific action, but it points to a perception of the links between race, gender, and the concept of outsiderness.

The concept of outsiderness is mobilized in order to demarcate boundaries of belonging. It locks individuals into assigned belief systems shared by homogenized culture groups. All Dagara women are Dagara; it is an ethnicity. Within the broad category "Dagara women" there are layers of variation based on educational level, social class, family background, age, religion, personality, and whether the person lives in an urban or rural area. There is no one emblematic or authentic Dagara woman. So whose purpose is being served by constructing difference based on ethnicity, gender, and race? Obioma Nnaemeka writes:

> In this day and age of globalization with massive population and cultural flows that are increasingly blurring the line between the inside and the outside, African women do not have the luxury of contending with a distinct outside and grappling with a clear-cut inside. The internal and the external are ever evolving, always contaminated and contested, mutually creating and recreating each other.[20]

Through the conflation of outsiderness, race, and gendered behavior, Dagara ethnicity is constructed as a homogenous social category in order to diminish the complex and overlapping boundaries that Dagara women are already negotiating.

Kofi Agawu writes that for African music scholars from the West, constructing difference is a means to assert power over African subjects.[21] Chandra Talpade Mohanty similarly writes that the construction of "Third World women" as a monolithic category viewed though the distorting lens of Western feminist

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[20] Obioma Nnaemeka, "Mapping African Feminisms," in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 31.

[21] Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

scholarship, relies upon narratives of difference that contrast the "liberated," autonomous, educated Western woman to the powerless, voiceless, victim—the category into which all "Third World women" are contained.[22] Through accusations of "behaving like white women," Dagara women are being constructed through narratives of difference: not externally, through the Western imagination of the African subject, but rather internally, through deployment of the notion of cultural authenticity.

Mapping concepts of authentic behavior onto sexed, raced, bodies is a silencing technique. It is an attempt to assign a fixed quality to culture and ethnicity so as to prevent "outside" behaviors or actions that are considered transgressive or undesirable. As it is not linked directly to a concrete definable action, it is deployed strategically as a means of asserting power by referencing deeply ingrained notions of cultural belonging and insiderism.

By reinforcing binary structures of Western/African, white/black, and outsider/insider this static notion of "cultural authenticity" is being held apposite to the lived experiences of Dagara individuals. Agawu writes that postcolonial theory "clear[s] space for the acknowledgement, indeed the celebration of the incongruities, contradictions, antinomies, and hybridity of postcolonial culture and experience as necessary elements in the adequate theorization of contemporary Africa."[23] This approach recognizes the actuality of lived experience in

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[22] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

[23] Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003), xviii.

contemporary Africa that is not compartmentalized into "traditional" and "modern" ways of living, acting, eating, dressing, thinking and performing music. According to Agawu:

> To describe an individual molded within such a culture as hybrid, to invoke the metaphor of *métisse*, is to undercomplicate the dynamics of identity formation. For only an aggressive and largely irrational postulation of the purity of origins will sanction a description of such individuals and experiences in terms of deviations from what are in effect less-threatening norms. Postcolonial theory normalizes hybridity and thus makes possible a truer, more ethical mode of identity construction. In the hands of its most imaginative practitioners, postcolonial theory dramatizes the complex convergences as well as divergences that constitute African life.[24]

In Dagaraland, the construction of cultural authenticity does not reflect the actuality of experience. When women are excluded from group membership through notions of "behaving like white women" they are prevented from fully participating in the postcolonial landscape they exist within, and they do not control the terms through which they refer to themselves.

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The employment of concepts of tradition and cultural authenticity as tactics to regulate bodies is at odds with the national policies of gender equity and gender mainstreaming. In Ghana, the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs (MOWAC), oversees the implementation of all gender-related policies. The mission of MOWAC is not constructed in direct opposition to traditional practices. The mission is to ensure equal access to health benefits, and economic and educational opportunities,

[24] Ibid.

and to work against practices that are damaging to women and children such as domestic violence. The official mandate of MOWAC is:

> …to initiate/formulate policies and promote gender mainstreaming across all sectors that will lead to the empowerment of women and achievement of gender equality, the survival, development and growth of children as well as the protection of the rights of women and children…[25]

During an interview with the Minister, Juliana Azumah-Mensah, she told me that for her, increasing women's and children's opportunities for education is the most important mission of MOWAC, because education directly combats all aspects of social control. She said that if you are educated it will be more difficult to convince you that you don't have rights, but when a woman is without an education, she has no voice to argue against her circumstances and against the regulations that other people place on her.

Although MOWAC operates on the national level, regional offices have been created in order to better address localized practices and ideologies. I interviewed the Regional Director of MOWAC, Mrs. C. A. Bob-Milliar. During our conversation we discussed the resistance that national gender equity policies were receiving in the Upper West Region. I had heard from several people that gender mainstreaming and equality programs strove to "emulate Western standards," to "change tradition" and that women whose behavior and attitudes were perceived as apposite to traditional culture were told they were "behaving like white women." "Why is equality only for white women?" she asked. Both the dismissal of gender equity efforts as "Western importations" and the accusation of "behaving like white women" aimed at Dagara

[25] This is quoted from unpublished materials given to me by Dorothy Onny, the Gender Desk Officer at the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs in Accra.

women rely upon the same divisive tactics. These serve to construct ideological differences based on race and nationality.

MOWAC's policy implementation is often criticized for being "top-down." Dr. Alexis and I spoke frequently about the tension between social change and the desire for cultural retention. This dichotomy between the West and Africa informs discussions surrounding social change, because change is perceived as always being unidirectional: towards Western ideologies. People who resist this change are seeking to control the terms through which they are defined, and are resisting being controlled by "Western" standards and values. Alexis noted that if you want to make change, you cannot implement a top-down policy; instead you must work within local cultural parameters to redirect people's understandings of the world. He believes that the policies put in place by MOWAC disregard local cultures and are therefore ineffective. Ultimately people will ignore or find ways to circumvent policies that do not resonate with their worldview and systems of thought. To him, the mistake is the implementation of policy. If you make an action illegal, it won't change the practice, but if you change the mindset of people, then they will change it for themselves.

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The rhetoric of tradition and authentic culture and the rhetoric of modernity and equality are macro-conversations about women—how they should behave, what they should have access to, and how much power they should have. Women living in Dagaraland who have not had access to formal education are the most vulnerable to

regulation because they have the least access to either of these conversations which directly impact the material reality of their lives, as well as how people perceive their behavior. These women are effectively silenced by both narratives of "tradition" and modernity, as the State and the class of Dagara educated elite employ their respective rhetorical devices in order to establish and maintain power hierarchies.

As demonstrated through perspectives such as Alexis's, Lambert's, and Mrs. Bob-Milliar's, individuals draw from local and global ideological systems in order to fashion opinions about social change and social policies. Although Western ideological systems are often portrayed as counter to "traditional" Dagara worldviews, Dagara men and women actively engage with a variety of ideas, regardless of their origin. Despite the move towards cosmopolitanism among many individuals, those without access to power structures are regulated through rhetorical tactics. These narratives of authenticity and belonging serve to control women's bodies and to establish and reconfirm existent power hierarchies. Despite such regulation, Dagara women resist being narrowly defined. Through their performing bodies, actions, and words, Dagara women demonstrate that they are also global actors, actively interpreting circulating ideological structures.

Rather than construct differences based on race, ethnicity, or nationality, incorporating postcoloniality into our visions of Dagara women's actions will allow the complexities of identity to emerge. Just as "acting white" is a diffuse statement, "acting Dagara" is similarly essentializing—for example, the narratives of female gyil players illustrate the multiplicity of selfhood, and the possibility of plurality. Part of

the challenge of writing about women in Dagaraland is in mediating the tension between tradition and modernity, and in representing the contemporary narratives of Dagara women, which are equally informed by the local and the global. Dagara women are both local and transnational actors.

Women in rural Dagaraland do not usually speak of "equality" because it has not been presented as an option and the implications of utilizing the language of liberal Western feminism are negative. Particularly for women living in rural areas, who have not had access to formal education, terms such as "equality" have been constructed as apposite to Dagara worldviews. The language of cultural ideologies is such that women know that the man is the head of the home, and has the cultural right to the lion's share of domestic power. Although the women are charged with managing the domestic life, ultimately the decisions belong to the men of the family. Dagara women do not dispute this—and in some cases reinforce verbally that "in Dagara tradition, women are not equal to men." Candy Kokum, the leader of the Langtaa *Pɔgbɛ*, who performs publically on the gyil, sings male dirges, and dances the male styles of bine, while also engaging with "male work" on the farm and in the home also resists the language of equality. She told me "tradition requires respect of the husband, therefore I cannot say I am the equal of men." This statement does not refer to her physical capabilities of carrying out male work, nor her capacity to engage successfully in activities such as performing on the gyil at funerals, but it refers to a deeply ingrained notion about the traditional hierarchy between Dagara men and women. Perpetua Woble, another female gyil player, also insisted that although her husband has passed away and she is taking care of the farm, the home,

and the children, that she is not the equal of men. Attaining "equality" for Dagara women is not prioritized, although they prioritize upward mobility for their daughters. Each of the adult female gyil players I worked with are sending their girl children to school, and articulated the centrality of this to the possibilities of social change. This denial of equality is directly at odds with the state rhetoric on gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

Obioma Nnaemeka writes that African feminist scholarship and action has to be "built on the indigenous."[26] Beyond recognizing and critiquing hierarchical power structures that silence resistant narratives, we have to locate and dialogue with non-oppositional strategies of resistance, and to consider the ways that bodies engaged in musical performance are essaying critiques of oppressive systems. For Dagara women, there is a mediation of the category of gender as it is connected to the sexed body—this mediation occurs through musical performances that offer the opportunity to redefine the boundaries of the body. The body is defined through the terms of the culture in which it acts. This includes mediating concepts of race and ethnicity, but also in negotiating the language of cultural authenticity, which is expressed through terms such as "tradition." Beyond this, the dichotomy of tradition/modernity that is reinforced through such language is confronted by acting through the spectrum of possibilities provided in a postcolonial landscape. Actors such as Georgina and Candy thus redefine the meanings of the Dagara female body by actively participating in a mediation of multiple categories of belonging.

[26] Obioma Nnaemeka, "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 29 no.2 (2003): 257-385.

Ultimately, Georgina and Candy remind us of the importance of listening to what women have to say about themselves. They demonstrate that those voices which are often excluded from cultural narratives are, in fact, re-writing cultural possibilities.

●KOSAGR●

I called Kosagr[1] to tell him that I was going to Wa for work; it was Wa market day and so there was a car going from Fielmua to Hamile. Most days I would have had to take a motorcycle to Hamile, but on Wa market day there would be car going. Hamile is a border town like Fielmua, but it serves as a transportation hub to Burkina Faso and to Wa, the capital of the Upper West Region. From Wa, you can get to most other places in Ghana. Hamile is where the border patrol and immigration services are located; it acts as an official entrance point to Ghana from Burkina Faso. After I called him, Kosagr met the car, which was sitting parked on the side of the road in the center of town. I was sitting next to the window behind the driver's seat, when he arrived. He climbed in the driver's door, sticking his head and shoulder around the seat to place a stack of folded money in my hand. I was instructed to use the money to buy phone units and call him while I was away in Wa. I thanked him, but was embarrassed. I knew that everyone in the car had seen what he had done and knew what it meant.

My relationship with Kosagr informed a significant portion of my research practice in Fielmua. The course of our relationship guided many of the questions I asked and shaped my perspectives on borderland practices, the political economy of sex, Dagara marital relations, the operative nature of class-based status, and sexual health practices in Fielmua. My overt attempts to learn about these practices and ideologies were far less successful than what emerged through our time together. In

[1] His full name is Naamwin Kosagr, which in Dagara, literally means, God will not agree. The fuller meaning is that God will not allow anything bad to happen to that person.

this chapter I examine several topics raised through our time together. First, I discuss the social condition of borderland identity as it relates to a history of colonialism and the postcolonial state in Africa. This includes a description of ethnic versus national identity formation, particularly referencing ideas about constructions of difference. As Kosagr's experiences show, borderlanders often utilize specific political and economic strategies that make use of national political boundaries. I explore the formation of social status in Fielmua through the development of my relationship with Kosagr and his relationship with Festus, another Dagara man living in Fielmua. The differences that arise between these two men are illustrated in the tensions that emerged through discussions of class and literacy. These differences point to underlying conflicts in the Fielmua community between tradition and modernity, and colonial legacies. Kosagr's perspective clearly portrays the construction and performance of class-based Dagara masculinity as it relates to the local power structure. Nested within Kosagr's narrative is a discussion of local sexual practices from both a male and female point of view. At times conflicts arise between customary practices such as polygamy and "friending,"[2] and women's desires towards upward mobility. In other cases, as I demonstrate through my relationship with Kosagr, upward mobility is explored through these same customary practices. This chapter necessitates an exploration of my erotic

[2] "Friending" refers to a man taking a girlfriend outside of his marriage. When you use the English word friend in Ghana to indicate platonic friendship, you must qualify that the relationship is not sexual in nature, or people will assume that it is. In Dagara language, the word for girlfriend/boyfriend is *sɛn,* the word for a male friend is *baper*, and the word for a female friend is *kyɛnɛ*. *Sɛn* also means a person of the opposite sex with which you are engaged in a gift exchange with. This relationship does not indicate a sexual nature, but revolves around offering each other gifts. It is customary and appropriate to bring gifts to people after you have been traveling, but this is not the same as the gifts given to a *sɛn*.

subjectivity because my public relationship with Kosagr not only shaped my access to other male voices, but it was through our relationship that I participated in a performance of local understandings of the political economy of sex. Within this, my race and locally interpreted social status were pronounced because of the status differential between Kosagr and me.[3]

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Previous ethnomusicological studies conducted in Ghana have been constricted by national boundaries. Generally, these studies either examine Ghana as a nation, or focus on ethnic groups within Ghana.[4] In either case, scholars have yet to reach across political borders. The confinement to national boundaries reinforces, or at least fails to acknowledge, that these lines that are both invisible and fictive, as well as real and meaningful, are the products of colonialism.[5] Musical practices,

[3] See Don Kulick, and Margaret Willson, eds, Taboo: Sex: Identity and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork, (Routledge: London and New York, 1995); and Gloria Wekker, The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), for further discussion on the erotic subjectivity of the fieldworker, and explorations of power differentials between ethnographers and the people they work with.

[4] Kofi Agawu, African Rhythm**:** A Northern Ewe Perspective (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); John Miller Chernoff, African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Barbara L. Hampton, "Music and Gender in Ga Society: Adaawe Song Poetry," in African Musicology: Current Trends, vol. II. ed. Jacqueline DjeDje (Los Angeles, California: Crossroads Press/African Studies Association, 1992), 135-149; David Locke, Drum Damba: Talking Drum Lessons. Featuring Abubakari Lunna (Crown Point, IN: White Cliffs Media, 1990); Ibid., Drum Gahu: An Introduction to African Rhythm (Tempe, AZ: White Cliffs Media, [1987] 1998); Ibid., Kpegisu: A War Drum of the Ewe (Crown Point, IN: White Cliffs Media, 1992); J. H. Kwabena Nketia, African Music in Ghana (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1963); Trevor Wiggins and Joseph Kobom. Xylophone Music in Ghana (Crown Point, IN: White Cliffs Media Company, 1992).

[5] For an excellent anthropological perspective and detailed historical account of the formation of boundaries in Northern Ghana, see Lentz 2006. This work details the creation and maintenance of ethnic groups by colonial administrators and anthropologists, and shows how subsequent political and cultural movements such as the introduction of chieftaincy, labor migration, the formation of a class of educated elite, and the influence of missionaries further contributed to ethnic identification in the region. Lentz effectively problematizes oversimplified notions of ethnicity as ahistoric and unresponsive, and counters the work of ethnomusicologists who have failed to account for constructions of ethnicity.

identities, and assertions of ethnicity in Ghana continue to be shaped by the construction and maintenance of "boundaries" both between nation-states and ethnic groups.[6] Christopher Waterman notes that ethnomusicological discourse on Africa has positioned itself "outside the very real world of colonialism, power relations, and the social production of knowledge."[7] Groups and individuals formulate ideas about who they are in relation to each other and within a nation with a specific history of colonialism, independence, and postcolonial relations with other nations in Africa and with the West.

The Dagara people, like many ethnic groups in Africa, are not contained within national borders. The borderland area in the Upper West Region is home to many ethnic groups who exist across national boundaries, as well as people who have moved to the area for work or school. Especially areas that act as official borders, like Hamile, are a mix of people, languages, religions, and customs. These boundaries are fictive in the sense that ethnic groups who occupy land across the border share languages, musical practices, and religious and social customs. On the other hand, national boundaries are "real," not only because they regulate economic and political power, but because identity is constructed in part by nationality, and in another part to a relationship with a colonial history. The Dagara people I lived with in Fielmua refer to the Burkinabe (people from Burkina Faso) as "French," including the Dagara people on the other side of the border. Although they share many social

[6] Carola Lentz, Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Ibid., "Contested Identities: the History of Ethnicity of Northwest Ghana," in Ethnicity in Ghana: The Limits of Invention, ed. Carola Lentz and Paul Nugent (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 137-161.

[7] Christopher Waterman, "The Uneven Development of Africanist Ethnomusicology: Three Issues and a Critique," in Comparative Musicology and the Anthropology of Music, ed. Bruno Nettl and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 179.

and musical customs their ideas about each other are informed by nationality. In fact, that they call them "French people" points to the colonial history and the relationship that francophone countries cultivated and maintain with their former colonizer. The attitudes that the Ghanaian Dagara have about the Burkinabe Dagara are instructive in pointing out how identity is formed relationally, and how colonial legacies are operative in a postcolonial landscape. The cross-border networks that are formed as a means of economic empowerment demonstrate how individuals in a border region make use of limited resources.

You can cross the border to Burkina Faso's Hamile, or French Hamile, as they call it in Ghana, by foot, bike, motorcycle, or car, and it is common to see people going back and forth for goods. This is also where the cargo trucks bring in goods from Burkina Faso to Ghana. On a few occasions I walked across the border to the "French market" in Hamile. Once I went with my friends Fatima and Faustie, after we had lunch at the Ghanaian custom's canteen. The Ghanaian customs officers' canteen has a man grilling tilapia purchased in Burkina Faso. It was so wonderfully prepared, topped with lettuce and tomatoes and mayonnaise that I had dragged Fatima to Hamile that day specifically to try it. Faustie, whose husband Karim worked as a custom's officer was staying in Hamile. She normally lived in Fielmua, but she was pregnant, and as her due date approached, she went to stay in Hamile at Karim's house. After lunch we walked across the border and went to the weekly market.

Markets operate on a rotating six-day schedule. Although every town has a daily market area, the weekly market is a time for people to purchase their weekly

groceries, household and farm supplies, clothes, jewelry, cloth, and various other items. Market day is also a social opportunity. Women sell pito in shaded areas, which are gathering places for friends and families. Men roast and sell goat, chicken, and guinea fowl meat to be purchased. Women make and sell sɛnsɛ. Men and women come from the villages to sell livestock, produce, grains, bread, spices, and eggs. Seasonal fruits, groundnuts, candy, fish, and spices, are placed in neat stacks on tables and mats. Men sell intricately woven Dagara smocks. Because of the rotating market schedule, people come from neighboring villages, and also from across the border to socialize. It is the liveliest day of the week in the town. Everyone knows the rotating schedule and coordinates business and leisure travel accordingly. In most days in Fielmua you couldn't get a car out at all, but Fielmua market, Wa market, and Hamile market were days when people travelled.

The day we went to the French Hamile market Fatima was making a production of not liking the "French" women's style of dressing, and the way they wore their hair. I had previously heard Ghanaian people criticize how the "French" people looked. Once, Kosagr and I were sitting in Point 7, my favorite bar, on Fielmua market day. As a border town, market day was a time in which a lot of Burkinabe came to Fielmua. I remember that he was looking at a woman, and said something to someone else, which I didn't hear. I thought that he was admiring her, but then he said to me, "French women are not correct." I replied that I thought she was beautiful, but he pointed to his foot and said that "French" women have flat

feet.[8] On another occasion Kosagr offered a somewhat contradictory opinion about the French women's sexuality. Late one night, he and I were sitting in Gordon's place, a local Fielmua bar, drinking beer and watching music videos. There was no one else there, and Kosagr requested that the bar girl put on one of his favorite videos. Paulina, the young woman working the bar obliged him. He told me that the music was "French" and that he loved their style of dancing. He then said that if you go to the French market that you will see many women "that you will feel"[9] but that you should stay away from them. I asked him why and he answered that they have HIV/AIDS.[10]

Although Kosagr maintained ideas about the inherent differences between French people and Ghanaians, his professional life relies upon cross-border trading. Kosagr sells sugar and batteries to the Burkinabe because the favorable exchange rate between Ghana Cedis and CFA[11] allows him to make an increased profit more than selling his goods in Ghana. This is an example of how the border operates as a means of economic empowerment in an area of limited economic opportunities. As Carola Lentz remarks, "…even if African borders were originally 'artificial' creations,

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[8] In Fielmua, men were always talking about women's feet; the most desirable women are those with high arches, and a flat-footed woman will bring you bad luck.

[9] That you will be sexually attracted to.

[10] Several people indicated that the risk of HIV/AIDS is higher in a border town. The statistics on HIV/AIDS in Fielmua, like many places, is not reflective of the actual number of people who have contracted the disease. The clinic outside of Fielmua does HIV/AIDS testing as a requirement for pregnant women, and they offer the service to everyone. However, most people I met said that they would never want to be tested. I asked why and some people told me that once you know you have it, you will die, and so it is better not to know, and not to have to suffer with the disease. Other people told me that because of the size of the town there are no secrets and nobody wants to be gossiped about. The nurses at the clinic were rumored to share patient's confidential files with their friends, and rumors spread quickly in small places.

[11] CFA franc is the currency in Burkina Faso as well as Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Sénégal, and Togo.

they have long since become an integral part of the lives of borderlanders. Borderland populations deal as pragmatically with the border as possible and maintain numerous cross-border networks…"[12] This "artificial" border is made real, in part, through the trade networks that have been established. The national political boundary thus operates to demarcate boundaries of belonging in terms of identity and acts as a permeable space allowing actors to establish economic networks.

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Everyone knew that he was actively looking for a second wife. For a man of his status to only have one wife was unusual. Many men of higher status only have one wife, but in Fielmua, as in other places in Dagaraland, there is often a separation between the educated class and the business class. Kosagr had earned money as a trader, which earned him a high-ranking social status in local terms. His friends, the other wealthy businessmen in town have several wives. I became friendly with his uncle, who everyone calls by his nickname, Secretary. We sometimes sat together and drank beer and discussed my work and his life. Secretary has three wives; he once told me that Kosagr didn't have a second because his first wife was controlling him, and that it was a shame. I had a hard time seeing that his wife was controlling him. Kosagr had earned a reputation for having many girlfriends. I heard story after story from the town's people about the women he had dated and his wife's

[12] Carola Lentz, "This is Ghanaian Territory!: Land Conflicts on a West African Border," *American Ethnologist* 30 no. 2 (2003): 274.

reactions.[13] If I asked him directly he always protested these stories, claiming that he didn't chase women. He would ask me if I ever saw him "moving" with other women, which I never did, and he denied having several girlfriends. He did once say to me that ever since he was young that "women just came to him." All I knew were rumors, but I imagined that he would never tell me the whole truth.

In Fielmua, for a married man to have a girlfriend is quite common and not socially unacceptable. People have many different outlooks on this practice. I had several male friends who did not have girlfriends, and they chose not to for different reasons. One was a devote Catholic who believed that he and his wife should be faithful to each other. Another said that he was afraid of HIV/AIDS, and that sleeping around could put his family in jeopardy. His father had passed away, and he was responsible for taking care of himself and his wife and three children, as well as his mother and his younger siblings. As the oldest man in the family, if he were to become sick or unable to work, the whole family would suffer. He also told me a story about an incident in which he gave a woman a ride on his motorcycle. Someone saw him and told his wife, who believed that he was friending the woman. When he returned home, his wife was very upset, and they had a terrible fight. He said it took him days to convince her that he did not have a girlfriend. As he said, "if you have a girlfriend, you will never have peace in your house again." Another male friend said that he could not have a girlfriend simply because he didn't have enough

[13] This type of story telling and the creation of rumor is primarily a product of the gossip networks between women, but are also common among men. People circulate information that is frequently not factual, but contributes to how individuals are characterized in the town's imagination. The details of the stories about Kosagr and his girlfriends could be fabricated or embellished or entirely factual. Regardless, he was characterized as such by many people in Fielmua.

money to support both a wife and a girlfriend, who would require chop money and gifts.

In a small town, hiding a girlfriend is difficult, but because it is socially acceptable, people frequently bring their girlfriends out in public. This does not mean that they flaunt it in front of their wives, who might become jealous, but that in front of their male friends and colleagues there is little reason to hide it. Other men do maintain secret relationships with women in other towns, so as not to attract attention or marital strife. Even if a wife does become upset, she has little recourse. Even men who are monogamists (at least in marital status) or Christians often cite polygamy as a legitimization of friending. They are permitted, they say, to have more than one wife, and so having a girlfriend is also acceptable. If the wife should complain, they can always move the other woman into the house, which most women would consider to be worse. I once posed the question to the women in my house, who told me that it is better to let your husband have a girlfriend than to have a second wife in the house. Once she is in the house, you have to be confronted with her everyday, and the opportunities for conflict are increased.

The knowledge that your husband has a girlfriend bothers women on different levels. Some are happy if they are being taken care of at home, if they have what they need then they do not focus on his romantic life. I knew women who were single who had left a boyfriend they found with another woman and were unable to tolerate the behavior. One woman had left her husband because of his many girlfriends, but this meant that she also had to leave her daughter. Under patrilineal systems of customary law, children belong to the man's family, and if the marriage is

dissolved, he usually acquires custody of the children if he desires. When I asked women what they would do if they thought their husband had a girlfriend, some told me that they would try and talk to him, to reason with him to find out why he was doing it, and what she could do to make him stop. Whether or not this would be effective would depend on the individual relationship and on the character of the man. If he chose to continue, she would either have to accept it or leave.

Even women who are members of polygamous families can experience jealousy, of course. It depends on how the husband distributes his time and energy, and if he treats them differently. Women in polygamous marriages often share resources and labor and use the opportunity as a strategy to make their lives more efficient. One household of polygamous women I knew were all friends, and said that the husband took care never to get involved in domestic disputes. If they were fighting, he remained silent until they worked it out, never choosing sides. Kosagr's uncle Secretary had three wives. One day he told me his secret to keeping the peace in the house. He said that each wife had a room and he also had his own room in the home. He constructed a rotation schedule by which he would spend one week with each woman and the final week alone in his room. Why? I asked. I had always imagined that polygamous men rotated nights. He laughed at me, and explained that if you try to do it that way, "you will kill yourself." If you switch wives every night, you won't have enough energy to please the women equally, and they will begin to quarrel and get jealous. But, if you rotate week to week, giving yourself a final recuperation and rest week, they will each be happy, and will not fight.

"Friending" young women is a regular occurrence in Fielmua. Many young

women, especially students, do not have access to making money, and therefore do not have a way to buy things for themselves. The political economy of sex in Fielmua dictates that if you are having sex with a man, than he gives you money for food, clothes, or phone credits, or he gives you soap, lotions, bread, or other gifts. Older men who have higher paying jobs are attractive to women who need money and who want to be given gifts. Both men and women expect to participate in this exchange, and although the precise circumstances of the amount of money given is not fixed, to not offer a woman money or gifts would be an insult.

Given the limited number of opportunities for young women in pursue higher education and a career path, resisting the advances of older men can pose a problem. Georgina's niece, Dorothy and I became friends after Georgina and I began playing the gyil together. Dorothy had been to secondary school, but was unable to gain admission to nursing training college. Although she was well educated her options in Fielmua were very limited. At the time, she was teaching part time at one of the junior secondary schools. She did not have a boyfriend. I asked her why she didn't have one, and she said that the "men will try to spoil you." She knew that the money that they would offer her would never compensate her for what she wanted for herself and so she chose to remain single.

One night I was having drinks with Festus and some of his friends who were telling me about the crowd of young men in Fielmua. A group of boys, some of whom I was acquainted with, had a reputation for sharing their girlfriends. I asked, what did they mean by sharing? Apparently, one of the boys would go and pick up their friend's girlfriend, but before delivering her to her intended date, they would have

sex with her. After that, her boyfriend would take her out, and later in the night would also have sex with her. The boys would then move on to new girls, and the reputations of the other girls would be tainted. In a small town, where everyone seems to know everyone's personal business, a reputation for being sexually active as a young woman would make it difficult to find a husband.

I was a close friend with an educated man, who I will call John, who was taking care of two of his brother's children, one a young man and the other a young woman. The young woman, aged fourteen, who I will call Hope, was causing my friend a great deal of stress. She disobeyed his rules, often skipping school and neglecting her chores. On one occasion, he woke up in the morning hearing her knocking on the window to be let in by her brother. When he inquired as to where she was, she lied, saying that she had fallen asleep at a girlfriend's. In order to catch her lie, he took her to the friend's house to ask the parents for the truth. Before they arrived at the house, she confessed that she had stayed with a young man. He was furious. The young man she had stayed with was a university student home on holiday. He had no money, so if Hope were to become pregnant, he would either have to drop out of school to work, or she would need to get an illegal abortion. John told me that Hope's best friend had already gotten an abortion, and he was worried about Hope's reputation and future. He said that whatever person you decide to become, you will find your equal in a mate. Both he and his wife were professionally trained, and he hoped that the children in his care would follow in their steps.

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Although Kosagr did not regularly buy me clothes or other gifts common to give a girlfriend, he did take care of me in many of the same ways that Dagara men take care of their girlfriends. Never once did he let me pay for drinks or meat when we were out, despite his proclamations that since I am white I must have money. Although I explained my student status, my nationality and race were associated with money and prestige. He also found out the foods that I liked and bought them for me. At night in Fielmua the egg stands open up and you can buy fried eggs and bread with tea or Milo, a chocolate drink. I adored the egg stands; not only did I like the egg sandwiches, but I liked the social atmosphere. Often the owners of the egg stands have TVs that they bring out at night, and groups of people sit around to watch music videos or Ghanaian and Nigerian films. The nightlife of the town is based around pockets of people hanging out and talking, drinking, eating, playing cards or ludu,[14] and watching TV or listening to music. He always knew where to go and who was doing what. What appeared inconsistent and hidden to me was second nature for him. He knew everyone and everyone knew that he knew me. Although I was often annoyed by his habit of showing me off, which I recognized as a public acknowledgement of his status, I liked to be around him. When nobody was around he told me about his business and his family, about his ambitions and the social prejudices that he felt against himself because of his lack of education. He liked to say that to "follow a girl" and not give her anything is "not correct." By this he means that to spend time with a woman and not give her money to buy things for herself,

[14] A Ghanaian board game.

or to give her gifts on a regular basis is not socially appropriate. He said that if he had money he would "handle me like an egg," but because he doesn't, he doesn't really treat me like his girlfriend. Although by his standards he was not courting me, he made many gestures that were interpreted by the town that way. But it was not just a public display; if I "flashed" his phone and asked for credit he would send some for me. He liked to say that my teeth weren't as strong as his, and when he bought goat meat or fish with a lot of bones, he would remove the meat from the bones and separate it for me.

I was perfectly aware that the majority of the town thought I was Kosagr's girlfriend. When I first got there, I only had a handful of contacts, and he helped me to integrate myself into the social scene. But he was protective of my friendship and got jealous if he saw me with any other men. Throughout my time in Fielmua he and I went out in the evening several times a week, sometimes every night. I don't know what he told his friends, but it was clear that people saw me as his girlfriend, even going so far as to call me Kosagr *pɔg*.[15] Once I was out with a few of my girlfriends, and I went to the bar to order a drink. Another man was standing there who I began chatting with. He told me that he knew who I was because he had seen me around. I asked him why he never came to talk to me, and he said that Kosagr had made clear his claim on me. I did become friends with another man, who owned a sundry shop, named Kako. Kako was friends with Kosagr, and Kosagr did not seem to mind the two of us getting to know each other.

[15] Kosagr's woman/wife.

Kosagr often picked fights with me in public, I imagine as a way to demonstrate power. He is reputed for his short temper and quick tongue, and often was getting in trouble with people for insulting those that he shouldn't. Age and professional status are serious considerations in Dagaraland. To insult a man of greater status or his wife is a social violation. Men of equal age, but lesser status are deferent to each other. The greater the status gap, the more respect must be given. Young men who are seated will stand and introduce themselves to older men of status. Although Kosagr had status as a successful businessman, he did not have the status of a professional. He could prevent men of his own social class and those below him from becoming friends with me, but he could not request the same from men with more money or power. As I began meeting more people and becoming friends with other men our relationship went through periods of extreme tension.

It was complicated. On the one hand I know that he enjoyed a sort of status based on our friendship, or that he imagined that in the eyes of his colleagues it elevated him. People did often ask me why he was my friend. He was very popular around town, but his reputation for being hot tempered caused some people to be wary of him. His success as a businessman caused the spread of rumors that he uses juju.[16] I can't really say whether or not our friendship affected the way people saw him. When we first met he couldn't speak but a few words of English and my Dagara was equally as bad. Through time his English improved as did my Dagara and the depth of our conversations increased. Being able to speak freely with me pleased him. As someone who attended very little school, his social class was limited, but he

[16] This accusation refers to the practice of obtaining power through magical practices.

is ambitious and wants to be successful, so he was actively trying to elevate himself. He once told me that he went to Burkina Faso and met a pair of white women whom he was able to speak with. This pleased him immensely. He was deservedly proud of his accomplishment, once saying to me that he could now travel anywhere in the world and get food and water. He was right. At first when he saw me in public with men of a higher social class, he would speak in Dagara to me, but over time he began greeting me in public in English. He was the only person I ever spoke in English to who had not attended school. Although by the time I left Fielmua, I only wanted to speak Dagara and he only wanted to speak English. Our phone conversations were often bi-lingual, with me speaking Dagara and him replying in English.

Although he seemed to attain pleasure from our acquaintance and often told people that I was his girlfriend, he showed no signs of being sexually attracted to me. In fact, he went out of his way to demonstrate that we were not sexually intimate. He never entered my house without leaving the door open so that the neighbors could see that we were not engaged in sexual activity. I asked him about it, and he said that he didn't want to damage my reputation, that if people thought we were having sex, they would think less of me. He elaborated and said that he was doing me a favor. He said that if he didn't put "a lock on the town" for me that every man in town would be worrying me every day. Apparently it's a public service. Despite his comments, he did treat me like his girlfriend most of the time, including flying into jealous rages, at times in public. And since most other people saw us as a couple, he told me that I "put a lock on the town" for him too. Although, I doubt that this was really true, he wanted me to think that he was not seeing other women,

anticipating my jealousy. And indeed, in my time there I never saw him with another woman in public, except when he was purposefully trying to make me jealous. I imagine that he continued seeing other women privately, or taking them to places which he knew I wouldn't go to or didn't know about.

My relationship with Kosagr taught me about how to negotiate boundaries and about the operative rules of relationships. Despite the fact that he took me out several times a week, he never let me pay for food or drinks. He would let me bring him a gift if I had been travelling, or buy bread for him at the market. When I was sick he brought me a bag of mangos. One morning he sent one of his younger brothers to my house with a gift of a rooster and two large cans of sweet condensed milk. Another day he called to ask if I liked eggs, and twenty minutes later another of his brothers brought me a bag full of fresh eggs. I appreciated and enjoyed his generosity but because of my work it is necessary for me to interact with more than one person. As I made more friends, he got more and more upset. He called me one morning in late October and reported that one of his friends had seen me the night before with someone else. He was incoherently upset, and he was making me upset. I had just made friends with the town's veterinarian, James Soyelleh, and his wife Carol. They invited me out with some of their friends, and I was delighted to go. In my mind I hadn't done anything wrong, but to Kosagr, it was a slight to him. Things got worse and worse for a while. On one occasion he and I fought about my friendship with another man who he thought was having a sexual relationship with me. Although I denied it, he was beyond furious. Maybe it shook the image of our

relationship to the public for me to be with anyone else, or perhaps he liked having a link to me that other's didn't.

I needed to make other friends, though, and I needed to work. Kosagr liked being with me, but if I asked him to take me to his family's house or introduce me to his sisters he would agree but then break the plans. Over and over again I would ask him to take me to a funeral or to visit someone who was sick and he would ignore me. It was frustrating. I wanted to work, and he only wanted to see me when he wanted to see me. At first if he saw me in town sometimes he wouldn't greet me; which is an insult. Early on in my trip I crashed my motorcycle and jammed the clutch. I was just learning and was traumatized by the event, which had been embarrassing and hurt my pride. I crashed my bike by mistaking the depth of a puddle, which turned out to be masking a big rock. I fell into the puddle, soaking my left leg, and amusing a group of on looking children. I thought everything was fine, so I continued down the road. By the time I realized that I couldn't downshift my gears I was too far from home to push the bike back, and I was stuck. There I stood on the side of the road with my motorcycle, waiting for someone to take pity on me. A group of people came over, but when I asked for help, they just blinked back at me. I know I was using the correct words, but my accent must have been terrible, rendering me incomprehensible. Finally someone came over who spoke English, I explained the problem, and they took me to the motorcycle fitters. Kosagr's shop was next door to the fitter's and he spent a great deal of time sitting in the rattan lounge chair under the big tree hanging out with his friends. When I got there I was upset, but trying to hold myself together, and I was happy to see him. He didn't even

look over to say hello, and I couldn't figure out why not. I was hurt, I felt lonely and bruised. After that I told him specifically that I didn't like being ignored in public and he never did it again. Being with him always felt like a negotiation. He had to figure out where my boundaries were and I likewise had to find his.

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At first, Festus usually hung out with Kosagr and me. The language barrier was an issue, but Festus's English was very good, and he served as a translator for the first few weeks of my trip. I have to say that those early memories of nights spent with Festus and Kosagr are some of my favorite. I was eager to learn everything and I couldn't have had two better teachers. Festus is a school teacher, his mother is a retired nurse who now runs a pharmacy in town, and his father, now deceased, made sure that all three of his sons went to school. Festus has two brothers, Francis and Felix. His parents were monogamous Catholics who were very active in the parish. Festus is married to a woman named Jane, and they have one son, Franklin. Kosagr and Festus appear to be very different on the surface; their different education levels, occupations, and goals make them seem like opposites. I enjoyed their differing perspectives, and they were both very gracious in sharing their stories with me. The three of us were always together in those early weeks, but eventually Kosagr and Festus suffered a rift in their friendship. I don't know if it was about me, or about something else. I could never get either of them to tell me anything specific about what had happened.

After Kosagr began to get irritated with me for making other friends, Festus and I grew closer. He stopped at my house every morning before he went to school, and throughout the day would always call to let me know where he was, who he was with and what he was doing. We had long talks about Dagara culture and his ideas about family and responsibility. Kosagr always said that he wanted to make money, and Festus was a fool for being a schoolteacher. But Festus thought that teaching was a reward, and it is better to do something that contributes to the community. Festus was socially engaged in other ways as well. For example he took it upon himself to sign up other people's children under his health insurance policy so that they could also partake. He was one of the few people who knew that Kosagr and I were not a couple, and found the whole thing quite amusing.

At that time, Kosagr was insisting to me that he was not married. I knew of course that he was, but he seemed determined to have me believe otherwise. I asked about it several times but he refused to tell me. I knew from other people that he was married, and that he and his wife had two daughters. Kosagr's family house was next to Georgina's and one day I was walking back from Georgina's with a girlfriend, when we passed Kosagr's family house. His mother was sitting in the front yard shucking corn and she called over to us. She began calling me Kosagr's wife, and greeting me enthusiastically. I was a little shocked, but mostly just amused. His wife then came out, who my friend recognized, and shook my hand. She said in Dagara to my friend that she shouldn't tell me who she is; she then said in English to me, that she was Kosagr's sister. I raised my eyebrows, and she said again, sister, and patted her chest with her hand. Then the mother stuffed my bag full of corn. On the way

home my girlfriend and I laughed and talked about it. I couldn't believe that his wife was willing to lie for him. I hadn't known what he had told her, and I wanted her to know that he and I were just friends, but she seemed as determined as he was to lie to me. I knew, of course, why he was lying. Kosagr had a very clear idea about white women that had nothing to do with me. He knew that white women were monogamous, and despised infidelity. He had a vision based on the media and rumors about white women, most of which was an exaggeration. I heard on various occasions that white women are fond of shooting their cheating husbands with guns, or that if you marry a white woman she will force you to wash her panties. Within this construction he must have felt that if he told me he was married that I wouldn't want to hang out with him, or if he had some larger plan to be with me it would be foiled. But for his wife and mother to be participating seemed so ridiculous to me. I went home and told Fatima and Christy all about it. They were in stitches and Fatima was appalled that a woman would call herself a sister to her husband with which she had two children. I was mainly fascinated by it; I knew that he was married, and so did everyone else, but he believed that I could be fooled by a simple lie. I suppose as an outsider, he believed that I wouldn't be able to see what was happening. I never felt it was malicious; after all, I was interested in how I was being constructed to him, and to his wife. But I did grow tired of the lie after a while, although it seemed impossible to get him to admit the truth. I really wanted to be friends with his wife, and as long as he thought he was fooling me I felt sure that it wouldn't happen. When someone accidentally leaked the information he would claim that they were trying to spoil his good fortune, and create a way to drive us

apart. It became ridiculous after a while. People would stop Fatima in town and tell her to tell me that he was married, that he was trying to lie to me. And yet his friends were going out of their way to back up his story. Carola Lentz, in characterizing the Dagara, re-affirmed the complaint that Kosagr is referring to. She writes, "Educated and well-to-do Dagara complain about the 'PhD-syndrome,' the 'pull-him-down' tactics employed by their fellow tribesmen who allegedly criticise anyone who excels economically or otherwise."[17] Kosagr mentioned this supposed cultural trait anytime I tried to confront him about him deception, insisting that people were trying to put a roadblock in front of his "progress."

Eventually he did tell me the truth. It was a few nights after Christmas, and I was out with a group of people. The evening was terrible. Once you live in a place for a while, people know you, and you feel like part of a community. But with the influx of people for Christmas and the festival, there were so many people visiting the town who had never seen me before, and I was being treated more as an outsider than I had in months. All the old feelings of resentment and loneliness came back. I lost it when an important man who was visiting the town asked me to join him and his friends for a drink, he then asked me to buy a round of drinks for him and his companions, a clear violation of cultural practices. If you invite someone to drink with you, then you pay. Asking me to buy the table drinks when I had been asked as a guest was a reinforcement of the idea that white people have money, and an insult to my knowledge of the inner workings of the culture. I eventually excused myself from the party and began walking home. Kosagr spotted me walking home in the

[17] Carola Lentz, Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 267.

dark and stopped me. He asked what was wrong but I couldn't tell him, I was too upset. I felt that if I began telling the story I might cry, which would be socially inappropriate and would embarrass him. He could see that I was unhappy and offered to take me to Point 7 for a Malta to cheer me up, and I agreed. I don't remember how the subject came up, but something came up about his wife. He began to lie and I refused it, he tried again, and I said, enough. For whatever reason, maybe because I was at the end of my rope, and he could see it, he told the truth about his wife and their children. I felt something shift that night. After that, I learned more and more about his life, and he shared with me aspects of himself that I hadn't known before. The door was also opened for me to become friends with his wife, which I very much wanted to do.

By Christmas Festus and Kosagr had completely broken off their friendship. Several people tried to get them to talk, including myself, but they refused to even greet each other. If I was with Festus, and Kosagr saw us he would greet me, but not warmly, and he would never sit down. They complained about each other. Kosagr complained that Festus thought he was better because he was educated. The dispute was unclear to me, but Kosagr said that just because Festus was a teacher and that "he knew the pen" didn't make him better. He said that he built the house he lives in, that he could do any number of things that Festus cannot do, and that being educated does not make you more valuable. Kosagr said that Festus had everything given to him, that he was spoiled, and that he looked down on those people of lower classes. I was surprised that Festus would have said any of those things. Once Kosagr and I had an argument in which he accused me of similarly thinking less of

him because he had no education. I was very hurt by the accusation, but it points out the general feeling that Kosagr had of being considered inferior because of his social class. Whether or not Festus actually felt that way, it was true that there was a divide in Fielmua between the educated and non-educated classes.

Beyond the status accorded to the educated class in Fielmua, there was an authorization of the educated voice. One of the reasons that people found it odd for Kosagr and I to be friends was that my status level based on my nationality, race, and education level was significantly higher than his. For the group of people who I associated with who were among the educated class, there was a presumption that in order to be able to speak about Dagara culture, one had to be educated. This group of educated men and women does not necessarily know more about their cultural history, but there is a legitimization of their perspective and ability to communicate cultural values. Kosagr knows a great deal about being Dagara, about Dagara religious practices, social customs, and worldviews. What he doesn't have is the status as a literate to raise those experiences to "cultural knowledge." He belongs to a generation of young men who want to participate in modernity through acquisition of material goods, and raised living standards. Lacking the education to become professionals, they advance themselves through business and politics. Kosagr was involved with the current Member of Parliament for Sissala West District, Bayirga Haruna. In fact, it was Kosagr who introduced me to the MP, which became a productive and pleasurable working relationship.

I knew that he was deeply bothered by his status as an illiterate. He maintains a strong sense of pride in his occupation as a farmer, but he values

education. Both of his children attend school. He says that if you refuse education then your family will always be poor. He believes that education allows people to achieve levels of autonomy and to act within a wider range of options. This attitude is the product of experience and an exposure to what the benefits of education are. Mostly education brings mobility, which is read as status in Dagaraland. Education also leads to the possibility of defining oneself outside of the limiting categories of group and class membership.

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The relationship I had with Kosagr was among the most complex I had in my time in Fielmua. There were moments that were painfully frustrating as we navigated each other's rulebooks. I had relationship standards and boundaries that I could not cross, such as being treated respectfully in public and being entitled to do my work freely. He also had boundaries and relationship standards that were sometimes difficult for me to comply with. Because we weren't in an intimate relationship, it was difficult for people to assume that we were, although it probably did keep me protected from receiving sexual advances from men in Fielmua. Even though we often had tension between us, and we argued about what people thought, the process of navigating those boundaries was instructive. He taught me about how relationships work and how men and women treat each other. Kosagr also taught me about how people are affected by the valuation of literacy and the stigma of illiteracy, and the constructions and operative nature of social class and status. I often thought that he wasn't interested in my work, but it was Kosagr who

introduced me to Georgina, and Kosagr who called me after I had returned to the United States to inform me that a Burkinabe woman had performed on the gyil publically at the Kakur Bagr Festival.

●BOSCO●

"The dominated live in a world structured by others for their purposes—purposes that at the very least are not our own and that are in various degrees inimical to our development and even existence."

--Nancy Harstock[1]

Dagara cultural identity is multifaceted and crosscut by divisions of social class, status, and location. For those Dagara people living outside of Dagaraland, identity is not the same as for those living in Dagaraland. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, those who have more social status, based on education, money, age, and therefore power, control the definitions of Dagara identity and how it is represented in the national landscape. Part of creating ethnic identity relies upon the mobilization of narratives of "tradition" and "cultural authenticity."[2] This cultural authenticity is enacted strategically at events such as the Kakur Bagr Festival, the annual cultural festival held in Fielmua. Describing the Kakur Bagr Festival offers an opportunity to demonstrate how culture is performed, to discuss the social agenda of the festival, and to explore the efficacy of this agenda. The festival is also an example of the performance of concepts of tradition as a means to participate in modernity. Finally, within the narrative of development promoted at Kakur Bagr there is a discrepancy between the rhetoric and the actuality of development projects. Offering the narratives of those working outside of the government system and the local development association, particularly referencing the work of John Bosco Damnyag,

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[1] Nancy Harstock, *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 241.

[2] Concepts of tradition and cultural authenticity are also discussed in Chapter Alexis. Chapter Bosco provides a case study through which these concepts are performed.

I show how individuals utilize alternative strategies for development. In the disparity between the officially sanctioned versions of culture performed at the festival and those who do not have access to creating this definition emerges a counternarrative of Dagara ethnicity through micro-narratives of empowerment.

For the Dagara people, living along the border of the country, their experiences are not prioritized in the national political landscape. There is a large economic divide between the north and the south, and within that division there is a power hierarchy of ethnicities and localities. Regional capitals have the most economic and political power, and to a lesser degree district capitals. Political boundaries control how resources are distributed, which has a direct effect on what citizens have access to. Resources such as water pumps, electricity, water tanks that provide indoor, running water, paved roads, cell phone towers, and internet access are not equally distributed even within the Upper West Region. Fielmua has electricity, although the surrounding villages do not. Some people have purchased solar panels for their family houses, which allow for villages not on the electricity grid to have power. Very few people in Fielmua have running water; only those who can afford private water tanks have this. Everyone else fetches water from the boreholes or the river. There is no paved road in the Fielmua area; during the rainy season the road can be entirely eroded by the rain. A lack of economic and political power effects how residents of the Fielmua area and the Fielmua diaspora manage the terms they define themselves through.

Asserting group identity is an important aspect of building group membership, which necessitates exclusion. This group membership is defined

relationally[3]—in relation to other ethnic groups and within a national framework. Dagara people report being discriminated against in the south, particularly in the metropolises of Accra and Kumasi. The southerners refer to the Dagara, as well as other groups from the north as *ntafo* or *pepeni*.[4] These terms, in Twi, the language of the Ashanti people, and the lingua franca for Ghana, are pejorative terms used to demarcate boundaries of belonging. Dagara people believe that ntafo means "twins" and refers to the northerners who come to the south in pairs; this metaphorically implies that the southern land is not theirs, so they must walk in pairs. People translate pepeni as "only a visitor," which carries the same meaning: although they too are Ghanaians, they do not really belong.[5] Lentz and Erlmann found among Dagara mine workers in the southern portion of the country, that the formation of Dagara ethnic organizations and the maintenance of social and economic ties to Dagaraland contributed to the development of relationally-based ethnic identity in the south.[6] For these mine workers, who experienced ethnically-based discrimination in the south, the establishment of a group based identity both solidified Dagara ethnicity and re-established links to Dagaraland. This relationally based ethnic identity is also made clear through the deployment of Dagara origin

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[3] See Louise Meintjes, "Shoot the Sergeant, Shatter the Mountain: The Production of Masculinity in Zulu Ngoma Song and Dance in post-Apartheid South Africa," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13 no. 2 (November 2004): 173-201, for a discussion of how categories of gender and ethnicity are performed relationally and within a global context.

[4] Several people relayed this information to me during the course of my fieldwork. Lentz also discusses these pejorative terms in *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 259-260.

[5] Lentz found a variation of related translations for these terms crosschecked with Twi speakers. *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 320, note 10.

[6] Carola Lentz and Veit Erlmann, "A Working Class in Formation? Economic Crisis and Strategies of Survival among Dagara Mine Workers in Ghana," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 29 Cahier 113 (1989): 69-111.

stories by the educated elite. Carola Lentz discusses the contested origin stories of the Dagara, and the motivations for the conflicting historical narratives, pointing out that origin stories are "flexible, and each can adapt to changing needs."[7] In particular the origin stories deployed by the educated elite are tactically constructed in order to lend legitimization to Dagara historical narratives. The construction of a historical narrative that links the Dagara people to the ancient kingdom of Dagbon, describing that they broke away from the Dagomba out of a desire for greater independence through a story that resembles the "exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt," is politically motivated.[8] Lentz writes:

> In contemporary Ghana, 'tribalism' is generally discredited as illegitimate nepotism, but belonging to a tribe is regarded as an integral part of being Ghanaian. Not all tribes, however, have equal prestige, and formerly 'stateless' peoples in particular are still regarded by many as 'backward' and 'primitive.'[9]

Thus the historical narrative promoted by Dagara intellectuals reframes the "Dagara record of 'statelessness,' which is no longer treated as an indicator of a low stage of development but as the outcome of an independent spirit and democratic virtues."[10] Both in the case of the Dagara mine workers laboring in a southern land, and the Dagara educated elite utilizing a historical account that links them as one people to a concrete homeland, the concept of ethnicity is framed within a larger national socio-political framework.

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[7] Carola Lentz, "A Dagara Rebellion against Dagomba Rule? Contested Stories of Origin in North-Western Ghana," *The Journal of African History* 35 no. 3 (1994): 492.
[8] Ibid., 458.
[9] Ibid., 490.
[10] Ibid., 490-491.

In addition to the construction of ethnicity as a tactic to position the group within a national political and economic framework, the desire to construct boundaries around "who we are," and to then perform this identity, is political strategy. This strategy is utilized variously by people asserting a sense of community, by those resisting or renegotiating prior ideological or institutional structures, as well as by those creating new cultural forms. It can also be a class-based strategy, as in the case of the educated elite constructing a homogenous Dagara ethnicity. The creation of a homogenous ethnicity of Dagara individuals ignores the power differentials of class, gender, and status.[11] Lentz writes, "In matters of daily life, the life-styles of the educated elite, migrants and farmers back home differ to such an extent that one can hardly speak of a shared culture at all."[12] In the context of a cultural festival, cultural heterogeneity and dynamicism undermines the political and economic strategies of such an event. By presuming an ethnic unity based around a host of traditions, shared values, and practices, "authentic" cultural behavior can be distinguished from "outside" influence of behavior and thinking.[13] What is at stake here is the preservation of a canon of cultural artifacts and ideologies, which refer to Dagara-ness—that which distinguishes the Dagara from their neighbors and other groups in Ghana. Lentz

[11] I am referring here to the homogenous category of Dagara portrayed at an event such as Kakur Bagr. There is an extended debate about the differences between the Dagara and the Dagaaba. At an event such as Kakur Bagr, as well as Kakube, the cultural festival in Nandom, a distinction has already been made by those manufacturing the event to refer to themselves as Dagara, as a distinct group from the Dagaaba. For an extended explanation of the Dagara/Dagaaba debate, as well as a detailed history of the motivations behind such a debate see Carola Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

[12] Ibid., 271.

[13] See John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity Inc*., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

notes the connection between the maintenance of a cultural canon and the broader implications implicit in such a design:

> What the intellectuals and the youth associations want to 'preserve' and refine as cultural traditions are language, local dances, songs, proverbs, stories, clothing, craft products, in short, and above all, a kind of local 'folklore.' The framework in which this 'cultural identity' is defined, the means by which differences from other localities and ethnic groups are expressed, always have national and also international dimensions, even when the 'material' is of local origin.[14]

My concern here is less with the establishment of Dagara ethnic identity, which is itself multi-layered,[15] and maintained through connections between home and diaspora, and more with the codification and performance of a cultural canon which *refers to* this ethnicity. Thus it is less important to determine who is and what it means to be Dagara and more necessary to determine who is able to shape and mobilize the narratives of ethnicity and authenticity surrounding Dagara-ness.

The construction of ethnic membership is, in one sense, fictive; it must be constantly re-performed to obtain meaning.[16] In order to establish boundaries of belonging, certain behaviors, attitudes, and actions become codified as either normative or transgressive. These boundaries are not entirely impermeable, however they serve to mark off clearly defined terms through which to understand oneself or one's community against others. When group members move outside of the prescribed codes, they can be dismissed as violators. However, these codes do not apply equally to all bodies. So, then, not everyone is regulated equally by culture

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[14] Carola Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 271.

[15] Even within the category Dagara, multiple layers of identity emerge through references to homeland territory, the patriclan system, and house of belonging.

[16] See Veit Erlmann, *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), for a discussion on how tradition and ethnicity are performed and accrue meaning through re-performance.

and the construction of ethnicity. When Dr. Alexis Nang-beifubah used the metaphor, "Can a Dagao wear a smock in a European winter?"[17] to illustrate that individuals have agency in responding to the codes that are written for them, he did not describe the conditions of people who do not have access to writing the codes, but are asked to abide. Dr. Alexis has constructed his identity around the power of the individual to move within a global culture, to be a cosmopolitan individual, who determines at which times he references local and global signs.[18] His colleagues who are members of the educated elite from Fielmua often take a different path of asserting locality through the narratives of tradition. For these individuals, Dagara traditions are maintained as a resistant tactic to the broader oppressive structures of political and economic marginalization. This is evident in the mobilization of "cultural signs" such as wearing a Dagara smock, speaking the Dagara language, listening to Dagara music, and organizing around ethnicity. Individuals organize around ethnicity outside of Dagaraland in a number of ways such as socializing in spaces where Dagara men and women go, by supporting Dagara cultural projects such as the Kakur Bagr festival, and by participating in the Fielmua Area Development Association (FADA).

There is a distinction between the class of educated elite to construct boundaries of belonging and those who are asked to abide by those categories. Although every Dagara individual is legitimized as authentically Dagara, not everyone is granted the authorial voice of cultural expert. As such, not all voices are

[17] See Chapter Alexis.
[18] Chapter Alexis problematizes the concepts of elite cosmopolitanism, globalization, and identity formation.

equally legitimized as knowers; all bodies are not equally regulated.[19] Miranda Fricker terms the process of being denied the capacity to speak, and the credibility of being a knowing speaker "epistemic injustice."[20] She writes that the powerful not only have material advantages, but that "the powerful have an unfair advantage in structuring collective social understandings."[21] In the context of Dagaraland, women, illiterates, and those without status do not control the production of this "collective social understanding," although they are asked to perform it.

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The Kakur Bagr festival is the annual three-day cultural festival held in Fielmua. Over the course of three days, members of the community and the diaspora participate in the celebration of local culture, socialize, and develop strategies for socio-economic development. Members of FADA, an organization that emerged out of a community need, developed Kakur Bagr. Originally Fielmua was part of NYDA, the Nandom Youth and Development Association, but citizens of Fielmua and those in the Fielmua diaspora saw that their particular needs were not being addressed by NYDA. So the literates from Fielmua began their own group to "champion the development agenda of the Fielmua area;"[22] they called their group the Fielmua Literate Association. Later they felt that the name would leave out those who are not

[19] See Alexander, M. Jacqui, "Not Just (Any) Body can be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas," *Feminist Review* 48 (Autumn 1994): 5-23, for a discussion on how certain bodies are regulated, governed, and prevented from citizenship in order to maintain established power hierarchies that reinforce dominant ideological systems.
[20] Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[21] Ibid., 147.
[22] Personal communication with Fielmua Naa. April 17, 2010.

literates, and changed the name. The goal of FADA is to bring together all of the people of the area, across ethnic boundaries, religious boundaries, and class boundaries. The establishment of Kakur Bagr was a way to not only celebrate the cultural practices, but to use them to develop the area. Kakur Bagr is modeled on the successful implementation of cultural festivals in Nandom and Lawra. Lawra's cultural festival, Kob-bine was the first such festival, beginning in 1982. A.S. Kalley, the publicity director for Kob-bine's 2009 festival says that the purpose of the festival is "To stimulate the socio-economic market, to market farm products, to integrate the northern sector, and to draw government attention to the north. This encourages people to be aware that you have to develop your own place without relying as much on government."[23]

The first day of Kakur Bagr is marked by the arrival of dignitaries and speeches made by dignitaries describing the significance of the festival, the importance of culture, and outlining the developmental needs and plans of the community. The following day is devoted to the performance of local dances, instrumental music, and singing. There is a bewaa dancing competition in which local youth groups from the surrounding villages and Fielmua town display their cultural knowledge and dancing skills, complete with uniform costumes and stylized dance movements. There are two geographically different styles of bewaa, a Nandom style and a Jirapa style.[24] Two distinct movements characterize both styles, each corresponding to the music performed on the gyil. The dancers, usually

[23] Personal communication with A.S. Kalley. October 9, 2009.
[24] Michael B. Vercelli, "Performance Practice of the Dagara-Birifor Gyil Tradition Through the Analysis of the Bewaa and Daarkpen Repertoire" (D.M.A. doc., University of Arizona, Tucson, 2006), 92.

alternating male and female performers, dance in a circle around the gyile and kuɔr drum. The dancers switch to a second, contrasting section upon hearing the cue from the gyil. This section varies between the Jirapa and Nandom styles, the Jirapa being more stylized. This section allows performers to show off their innovation and athleticism. Often dancers perform duets of male and female pairs while the rest of the dancing group kneels and watches. Sometimes the solos are humorous, silly, sexually intoned, and playful. The characteristic movement is the rapid contraction of the back, giving the effect of a snapping back and forth of the chest and shoulders. During the performance audience members sometimes "dash"[25] soloists who have performed especially athletically, creatively, or have aroused a response from the crowd.

Additionally, there is a women's bine dancing competition, showcasing groups of women wearing matching cloth. These women can be affiliated through family, friendship, or formal organization such as Nandom Hospital, a Plan Ghana group, or an unofficial women's group. The women's singing competition features women who sing while performing traditional grinding methods on a stone. The men's bine competition is a demonstration of the various male style of dancing bine. Men wearing coordinated outfits perform athletic leaps into the air, feet kicking out, stirring up the dust under their feet. The highlight of the competition is the solo gyil competition, in which the winner competes for a new gyil and the title of best

[25] Dashing is a practice in Ghana in which musicians or dancers have money stuck to their foreheads by audience members. This is a form of praise, as well as an opportunity for the "dasher" to show off expendable money. Various forms of this practice take place across West Africa.

xylophonist. The competition is punctuated by audience participation bine dancing in which the various patriclans are asked to come up and dance together.

Figure 21: The Kakur Bagr Festival Grounds.

Figure 22: Bewaa dancing.

Figure 23: Clan-based bine dancing.

Figure 24: Women's bine.

Figure 25: Men's bine.

Figure 26: Men's bine.

Figure 27: Men's bine.

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I scheduled a meeting with Fielmua Naa,[26] Dr. Francis Naa Mwin-ir-me Danikuu II, who is also a lecturer at the University of Development Studies, School of Medicine and Health Sciences in Tamale. Fielmua Naa holds a master's degree in clinical microbiology and is currently a PhD student in biotechnology. He has been the chief of the Fielmua area since 1987. I was interested in speaking with him about his perspective on the primary social problems affecting the area, and how the Kakur Bagr festival is able to address and alleviate these issues. When I met with him at the palace, he told me that he also invited his counsel of elders to join the meeting, so that they could contribute their perspectives. Fielmua Naa resides in Tamale, and so he relies upon his counsel to provide him with the most up-to-date information on

[26] Chief of Fielmua.

the happenings in Fielmua, and to act in his absence. I was glad to have his counsel present, because although I had not anticipated it, the various levels of educational status represented at the meeting provided an array of perspectives informed by access to formal education. As I discussed in another chapter,[27] the valuation of literacy results in a demarcation of boundaries between those without access to formal education, and how they are regarded as knowledge bearers. Fielmua Naa and his counsel spoke to me about the key social issues in the area. Most important, they said, is poverty. "The farmlands have been exhausted and do not yield crops as they used to," he stated. "Subsequently, getting enough food to feed the people is a problem. This poverty affects all aspects of their [the people of Fielmua] social life including their ability to pay for their children's education." According to Fielmua Naa the national government is not responding to the local needs of the people, but rather, it is the NGOs operating in the area that are working to address the concerns of the people. I tried to shift the conversation to ask more specifically about how women were affected by the lack of economic resources and opportunities in the area. For the majority of people living in Dagaraland, particularly those without professional careers, who are farmers or livestock raisers, it is the men in the household who are responsible for providing food and money for the household. Throughout my time in Fielmua, many women told me that when a husband is not able to provide adequately, or he chooses to withhold money from the women in the house, women are disadvantaged. Fielmua Naa and the other men in the meeting explained to me that the most serious problem for women in Dagaraland is poverty.

[27] Chapter Kosagr.

I mentioned that I thought this problem crosscut gender boundaries because both men and women suffer from poverty. Fielmua Naa, said yes, but the impact is greater for women because "if the man is poor, than the woman is poorer." I then understood what it was that Georgina had told me in our first meeting together. I thought that she and I were have a miscommunication when I was asking for information on women's issues and she was speaking about poverty, which I understood as a general social condition. The reality of her life, is an example of the specific social conditions that Fielmua Naa was making clear: if the family is suffering from a lack of resources, the burden falls to the woman to find money to feed and cloth the family and to pay for school fees. Thus the lack of resources in the area actually affects men and women differently. This is a class-based issue as well, because women who have had access to formal educations and now have careers outside of the home, although they maintain the responsibilities in the home, they have salaries which supplement the household needs. Women without formal educations also work, as previously mentioned, by frying sɛnsɛ, brewing pito, weaving baskets, and selling items in the markets. Fielmua Naa believes that organizations like Plan Ghana are helping to alleviate these problems by educating men and women in the communities about how to work together for the betterment of the family. This includes redefining the barrier between men's and women's work. As Madam Mary described, by educating through example they can demonstrate that men can aid women in their domestic duties, and this will actually benefit the family as a whole.

Fielmua Naa pointed out to me that we were discussing issues surrounding gender and sex, and yet I was the only woman sitting in the group. He said, "look, the women are here, but they are over there." I knew that the women were present; I had heard them sitting together and talking in an area just behind us. I asked why they were not invited to come and speak to the group, since we were discussing the topics of gender and development. He said that he could have asked them to come, but even if he had, they probably would not want to speak to the group. Fielmua Naa stated that the women who would speak would have a certain kind of character, but most married women would prefer not to discuss their opinions in a public forum. I had observed this myself, that when I was in a group of women they spoke openly with each other, but in mixed company they tended to be quiet. In fact, Fatima had walked with me to the chief's palace that afternoon, and was sitting among the group of men during the entire conversation. She never spoke a word to the group. It was not until later that she and I had a private conversation about what had transpired at the palace. She had clearly chosen not to contribute her opinion in that semi-public forum, however she did not explain her motivation for keeping silent. What exactly were the character requirements for public speaking among women? Did Fatima not possess the character that Fielmua Naa spoke of? Would she have been heard or valued if she had chosen to participate? This exclusion of female voices, and Fatima's choice to remain silent reminded me of Helena's decision years earlier to tell me her story only when Prosper was not present.

The topic of conversation turned to the Kakur Bagr festival and I noted that in my observation the dignitaries chosen to speak at the festival were all individuals

belonging to the class of educated elite. As politicians, directors of ministries, and chiefs, they all have access to the structures of power. This made me reflect upon in what forums development of Dagaraland is held, and who is invited to the conversation. I said to the chief that I particularly noted the lack of speakers who actually reside in Dagaraland, especially those who are termed "illiterate." This group of people, although not formally educated represents the majority of the people living and working in the area. Do they not also deserve a seat at the table in which the material reality of their lives is affected? In my experiences, illiteracy had nothing to do with cultural knowledge; it does however impact *perception* of knowledge and the authority to speak as a representative of one's own experiences. When I shared my interpretation with the chief and his counsel, the men, many of whom belong to this category, began laughing. "Yelminga na." It is true.

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This year[28] the festival began on December 29th. The first day of the festival is the day when all the "big men" come and give speeches to discuss the needs of the area in a public forum. Fielmua Naa spoke about the festival as a means to "market the cultural potential of the area," and a device to unite the ethnic groups within the region. He pinpointed the condition of the roads as a major problem in the area. Not having paved roads cuts off the area from the rest of the country and impedes development. When the rainfall is severe, the roads erode, causing major accidents and eliminating trade routes. He also implored the government to extend electricity

[28] 2009

to the villages, and to provide the community with public toilets and mechanized boreholes. The Member of Parliament (MP) for Sissala West District, Bayirga Haruna discussed the unequal development between the north and the south. He mentioned that there are residual colonial policies that are hindering development in the area. Dr. Alexis Nang-beifubah, the chairman of the festival gave a speech on the dangers of alcoholism. Each of these speakers addressed a major aspect of the festival: the need for development, the specific problems of the local population, and the desire to use culture as a marketing tool to stimulate economic development.

I arrived to the festival grounds a few hours too early on the day of the festival. No matter how many times I had been to an event like this, when somebody told me that it would start at 10am, I would be there at 10am, and be the only person not to realize that the event would really start at 1pm. While I was waiting around, I called Dr. Alexis to see where he was. He came and picked me up from the festival grounds, and we drove around chatting for a while enjoying the air conditioning. I asked him what he was going to speak about, and he told me that he was going to speak about alcoholism in the area. He paused, then, and asked how he was supposed to give a speech on alcoholism to the local population. Seemingly insignificant, his concern highlights a major problem with the festival: the gap between the analysis of the social conditions of the area, the specific needs of the community, and what can actually be changed in such a forum. Although he gave his speech in Dagara, his concern was that the medical information he was relaying, his

plea for people to stop drinking akpetesie,[29] and the social effects of alcohol consumption, especially on women, would be easily dismissed or not well received. Indeed, he concluded his speech with a list of recommendations:

- Intensify education at all levels especially in schools, churches and mosques
- Ban sale and consumption of akpetesie (very unlikely)
- Increase tax on akpetesie (now only 20% increase which is not enough)
- Patronise pito[30] and improve its quality[31]

His suggestions certainly have merit, however, his concern about presenting this information to the local population was later echoed by other community members I spoke with that asked whom these comments are being directed towards. That is, who is meant to be listening to this and implementing change?

The goals and the agenda of the festival are clearly stated in the speeches at the festival and also when speaking to the festival organizers, supporters, those who run the Fielmua Area Development Association, and the chief. There is a discrepancy however between the stated goals and the implementation of the development agenda. Thomas Tenguo, the local FADA chairman and I discussed some of the problems of development in the area. Thomas is from Buurteng, a village in the Fielmua area. Thomas explained that FADA has a local branch, based in Fielmua and

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[29] "A locally brewed GIN usually made from sugar molasses or palm wine etc. It contains very high levels of alcohol and in some instances some harmful elements." Dr. Alexis Nang-beifubah, "A Talk on Alcoholism at the Occasion of Kukur Baghr at Fielmon 30TH December, 2009."

[30] Also called Dagara dāā, "Pito: This was the original alcoholic beverage widely used in northern Ghana and for that matter Upper West Region. It is a local beer brew from sorghum or maize and has low alcohol percentage and significant nutritional values containing iron, vitamin K, C, B and carbohydrates. This was taken any time in the day sometimes the first time in the day. It was also offered to any visitor to a household even early in the morning and was really useful as it provided the beneficiaries with needed instant energy. It was mostly used during physical work on the farms as energy boosting." Dr. Alexis Nang-beifubah, "A Talk on Alcoholism at the Occasion of Kukur Baghr at Fielmon 30TH December, 2009."

[31] Dr. Alexis Nang-beifubah, "A Talk on Alcoholism at the Occasion of Kukur Baghr at Fielmon 30TH December, 2009."

also several branches across the country in Wa, Tamale, Accra, Sunyani, Gwollu, Bolgatanga, Tumu, and Kintampo. The organization is intended to bring together ideas and implement development projects in the area, irrespective of political affiliation. The Kakur Bagr festival is a project that was developed by FADA in order to stimulate the local economy, to bring government attention to the developmental needs of the area, and to highlight the cultural significance of the Dagara people. Each branch of FADA, at the end of the year pays dues based on their membership. The money that is brought in is intended for a number of development projects such as a public toilet, a urinal pit, and a community center. FADA invites guests such as the Regional Minister, the DCE, the MP, and the regional directors of ministries to come and speak at the festival. Although they do not pay them, they spend money on buying them drinks and food. According to Thomas, the district assembly often contributes other things to the festival such as the chairs and the canopies. The chiefs of the surrounding villages also contribute items such as goats, bowls of guinea corn, and brewed pito. These items are used to feed the dignitaries. Thomas mentioned that all dignitaries who come are given a goat. Contributions are also made from "sons and daughters" of Fielmua; Thomas said that FADA gives out envelopes to groups such as the tailors, the goat dealer's association, the cattle dealer's association, and the secondhand clothing dealers asking for contributions. Those contributions are used to purchase goats for the dignitaries and to take care of the guests. I asked Mr. Tenguo if he thought that the festival was productive in terms of area development. He replied, "Well, I can say that it is productive in the sense that it was through the festival certain things are in place now. For instance, I

can say it was through the festival an appeal was made to the then Sissala District, that time it wasn't Sissala East, Sissala West. An appeal was made to the MP to the then Sissala District, and through that appeal a vehicle was given to the clinic…it was also through that appeal that lights were given to the community, from which we are benefiting now. And so many other things…" He continued to say that the executive of FADA has so many developmental plans. He cited examples from this year's annual general meeting in which they discussed correcting the road that runs from Gaaperi to the clinic. This road serves as a shortcut for the clinic vehicle to take someone from the clinic to Nandom hospital.[32] Other imminent issues are the establishment of a secondary technical school in the area, and the establishment of an examination center in the district. Currently school children have to travel to Gwollu, the district capital, to take their Basic Education Certificate Examinations. Fielmua Naa similarly said that he thought FADA has done a lot of work in terms of stimulating development in the area. He said, "It seems like if you look around we don't have a lot of development. But, if you compare Fielmua to its sister villages, you will see that we have moved several steps ahead of them. Why am I saying this? The parish, the market, the electricity,[33] the schools—normally when we're able to get the politicians at the functions that is when we appeal, and they make the promise, and we do a follow-up, and when they meet their promise, we get some of these things. When you do not have some of these social functions, definitely, you

[32] Nandom hospital is the nearest medical facility staffed with doctors.

[33] Fielmua got electricity in 2007. Fielmua Naa told me that it was during the 2006 Kakur Bagr festival that he made the appeal to the Regional Minister to extend the national electricity grid to Fielmua. It was then that the Minister stood up and promised that by the next year's Kakur Bagr there would be "light." And there was light.

will not get your politician to commit himself." He concluded, "Once you give us a piece of the national cake, we are happy."[34]

I spent the entire day at the festival grounds watching and listening. During the whole Christmas season, but especially during the festival the town is abuzz. People come home to be with their families, to bring things from the south, and to see old friends. The festival attracts visitors from around the region, government officials, ministers, MPs, regional directors, and other "big men." I had been told that frequently Westerners made a point of coming to view the festival. The bars, normally barren, are stuffed with people. Everyone has visitors in the home. The crowds of people packed into storefronts and living rooms enhance the pastime of "roaming." The shops carry fancier cloths and purses, shoes and readymade shirts brought in from Kumasi. Everyone has a new dress or a few. The town is full and lively, a time for meeting new people and seeing old friends. After the full day at the music festival I met up with some friends at one of the local bars. I was busy telling Festus about the music and the speeches, and he said to me, "All the big men come and give the same speeches every year at the festival, but nothing ever changes. They come with their fancy cars, say their piece on development and change, and then drink, and go home." His observation made several good points. The town really comes alive during the festival; people from other places come and spend money, and stimulate the local economy, but it is not sustainable development. It is a moment. He points to another function of the festival: the opportunity to display

[34] See John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity Inc*., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), for further discussion on cultural performance as a bid for materials and services.

status. As has been noted elsewhere[35] among the Dagara, high value is placed on an individual's ability both to leave the home community and to return with material and symbolic wealth and power.

For me, it was instructive to stay in the town after all of the visitors had left, and everyone else returned to where they are going to school or working. Now it is the dry season; there is no work and no farming. The young men go to Kumasi or Accra for migrant labor. Festus was pointing to the discrepancy between the face of the festival, the agenda of the festival, and what remains there at the end of the day. His skepticism about social efficacy of the event made we wonder what is behind the cultural production moment, and if there is a possibility of continuous change in the area.

Others have noted the discrepancy between the agenda of these types of cultural festivals and the amount of change that actually occurs. Pointing to the personal politics inherent in such an event, a Ghanaian publication published a criticism of Nandom's Kakube festival:

> It is important to note however, that in recent times, forward-thinking indigenes of Nandom have mooted the idea of turning such an important festival into Nandom's own forum for selfless engagement in the development concerns of the area. Although a brilliant idea, this matter is currently languishing in the dusty corridors of Nandom, held sway by its new power brokers and intelligentsia, many of whom are well-known more for their empty promises than for any substantive contributions to the development of Nandom. The next Kakube celebration is fast approaching and by November, the community might be preparing to celebrate another harvest (or the lack of it), perhaps without any innovation whatsoever, because the same elements who have for a considerably long period of time held the Kakube Festival hostage, and new operatives who continue to

[35] Carola Lentz and Veit Erlmann, "A Working Class in Formation? Economic Crisis and Strategies of Survival among Dagara Mine Workers in Ghana," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 29 Cahier 113 (1989): 69-111.

> subvert the Festival for personal political aggrandizement, are determined that the status quo of abject poverty and bitter divisiveness not be upset at all. The evidence is clear.
>
> Self-seeking politicians, with an agenda seeking to hijack the occasion into political gamesmanship, and keeping Nandom economically backward relative to many other places in Ghana, would again descend on Nandom like vultures upon carrion; like vultures, one knows what to expect? Until Nandom is virtually stripped to the bone of whatever political capital it has left, these "new" pro-Kakube elites would overnight turn Nandom into a pseudo-NPP mock delegates conference, where favours are traded.[36]

In addition to the social agenda of the festivals, the production of "culture" in the public arena provides a context for mediating such an agenda. Lentz notes that cultural festivals in Ghana are spaces of negotiation of a number of inter-related groups:

> The relationship between local elites and the people, the state and the chiefs, and national and local ethnic identities is staged and negotiated in many fields of action at the festival, such as the politics of invitations, spatial performance, programming, dress, dance, and not least, the speeches. The festivals are, on the one hand, interfaces between local communities and the state at which government representatives attempt to popularize official policy while local political elites seek to have their own claims and projects accepted.[37]

Lentz's analysis of both the Kakube and Kob-bine festivals shows that politics and culture are intimately intertwined at such a public production. She also notes that these are performance spaces in which local ideologies about ethnicity and inter-ethnic relationships emerge. The codification of local styles of dances gives participants the opportunity to reassert identities of surrounding locality, not just ethnicity. For example, in the context of Kakube, she asserts that the performance of

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[36] http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/artikel.php?ID=91782

[37] Carola Lentz, "Local Culture in the National Arena: The Politics of Cultural Festivals in Ghana," *African Studies Review* 44 no. 3 (December 2001): 69.

bewaa links performers to Nandom, the place where bewaa dancing was developed in the 1950s.[38]

Both Alexis's and Festus's statements and concerns reinforce the ideas that there is a discrepancy between the social agenda of the festival and the reality of the implementation of change and development that arises out of the festival. There are different levels of social class in Dagaraland, marked by status. At the top are the people in the diaspora who have gotten out of the town or the village entirely, who have the organizational power, and the power to critique and potentially change society. But underneath them are the people who continue to live in Dagaraland, who work to change the place from the inside every day, who have to face the people they talk to, see the problems, and live with the problems. Within the local population are different strata of social class as well. The "illiterate" population is at the bottom of the social ladder in terms of policy making and controlling the production and dissemination of culture.

Interestingly, the social problems that were addressed during the festival are important and large-scale, but the strategies that individuals living in Dagaraland employ to combat such problems were not mentioned. Those people who are working to affect the lives of the community members do so from within. Individuals create networks of support and resource building that are both built into the Dagara social structure such as utilizing the extended family system and innovative, such as signing up people who are not members of the family for health insurance. Community members often pool resources to send young people to

[38] Ibid.

training college or universities. These solutions, while not recognized by the larger governing bodies, are illustrative of how people take the systems that they operate within, and formulate innovative resistance patterns.

I became acquainted with a man named John Bosco Damnyag, who is from the Fielmua area, and is now a doctoral student living in Accra. Bosco began an NGO called Sustain the Future, which operates in the Fielmua area. One of the projects of this NGO was the establishment of a community library in Fielmua. I asked Bosco if he had gone through the Fielmua Area Development Association with the project. He told me that FADA has a problem with the misallocation of funds. He pointed out the discrepancy between "development talk" and the actual development projects that FADA is able to implement. Bosco represents the strategies that community members employ to bypass the government and groups like FADA. Bosco says that when he speaks about development that the "big men" will regard him as a "small boy" and therefore ignore his ideas and strategies. What he is pointing to is status, and how it is earned in Dagaraland, and what role that plays in controlling development and the cultural products, which contribute to development. Seniority and money are two major factors of status; although Bosco is well educated, by establishing a community library without the support of FADA he appeared to be circumvented the culturally established power hierarchy. Thomas Tenguo explained to me that he felt the library was contributing a lot to the community, "irrespective of political denominations, because students can come from Cheboggo, Kyetu, and other sites to study and acquire something and go back, and it helps them." Thomas noted that Bosco did not go through the formal structures of FADA because the

amount of time it would have taken for him would have been excessive. It would have had to go through the committee meeting, funds would have had to be allocated, and everything would have to be formally approved. Instead he decided to act as an individual to secure the land, build the building, and stock the library with books and a computer. Thomas said that Bosco "saw that its not easy for a group taking up a decision, but an individual is very fast." He then speculated that people thought Bosco was going to use the library to generate income, which is not the case. We discussed it for a while, and Thomas said that it was a disgrace to people who had "gone higher." I interrupted him, asking how much higher you could go than Bosco, who was nearly holding a Ph.D. Thomas laughed, and said, that "Well, actually it's not education that matters, but age." He then offered a solution, saying that it should be brought up at the next year's annual general meeting. He said, "Look at what one of your sons has done. He has built a library. No one supported him; he did it on his own. For the betterment of his community. What can we do now to support him with the good ideas he has?"

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Fielmua Naa and I concluded our conversation with him saying that ultimately Kakur Bagr cannot "bring a structure and put.[39] But it can bring the politicians so that the traditional people, the people, can speak to them, to get them committed to develop the area." I decided to end our conversation by telling Fielmua Naa about Bosco's library. He told me that now that he knows about it, he promises to bring it

[39] This means that the festival will not literally build a structure.

up at the next Kakur Bagr, to appeal to the Minister and to the people for contributions. He said, “Definitely when the government sees that we need this thing for our people, they will promise, and we will follow up and get what we want.”

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The performance of culture at the Kakur Bagr festival is an opportunity to investigate the public production of Dagara ethnicity. In Dagaraland, social identity is directly linked to development and access to economic and social resources. The festival is viewed as an opportunity to connect with the various government officials as a means to stimulate development while simultaneously fostering community unity. The cultural festival specifically markets traditional culture as a means to stimulate the local economy and to solidify ideas about ethnicity. Within this, not all groups have equal access to defining group membership and its performance. Specifically members of the class of educated elite determine what constitutes cultural authenticity, and how tradition should be strategically enacted. This group defines the social agenda of the festival as well as the agenda for development of the area. Individuals working “outside” of the system provide a counter-narrative that demonstrates alternative ways to enact cultural productivity. Bosco illustrates that although status is granted through cultural channels, micro-narratives of empowerment provide an alternative vision of Dagara ethnicity.

●THE WOMEN OF KANKAN DUOLE●

Zie liɛba zie liɛba, a pɔgbɛ zie liɛba, ti bobr a song-fu
The place is turning, the place is turning, the women's place is turning, we want help
--Dagara women's song

A pɔgbɛ ko song taar zina, bɛ na tan sɔgɔ ko nyɛ tome
The women won't help each other today, they will reach a time they won't see work
--Dagara women's song

Today I went to the library to see how the new librarian was faring. On the way home I passed by Kako's shop to say hello. He asked me to stay for a while, and so we sat and played ludu[1] with a group of men for a bit. Kosagr rode by on his motorcycle, and picked me up and took me to Gordon's place for a beer. Kako came with us, and the three of us were sitting in the shade drinking, talking about nothing when a group of women wearing matching cloth passed by the door singing. They came in and crowded around Kako, singing and clapping and dancing. He got up and danced with them for a minute, and they all cheered, and left the bar. I was fascinated; I'd never seen a group of women behaving like this in public. Kosagr explained that they were Kako's family women having a party. I wanted to follow them, and so the three of us went to Point 7 to join them. Kako bought the group of women a round of beers and fowl meat to split between them. The TV in the bar was playing music videos, and the women were assessing the dancing styles and the outfits of the female dancers. Eventually, after they had been drinking for a while they started getting up to dance to the music on the TV. They were dancing and

[1] A board game commonly played in Ghana.

drinking and waving their handkerchiefs in the air. Even Kosagr, who really dislikes dancing, was getting into it. A group of the women lifted him up in the air and carried him around—thanking him for buying them drinks. Those women drank more than I had ever seen Dagara women drinking; every bottle that came out was gone in seconds. They pulled the bar owner out to dance, and then proceeded to lift him off his feet and carry him around the open aired bar. I was astonished—in Fielmua, it is unusual to see people dancing in a public bar. If you do see someone dancing, everyone else is busy talking about what a drunk the person is. It is okay to drink, but socially unacceptable to act drunk, which includes dancing in the middle of a public space. Apparently the women's party was acceptable because they only have such a celebration once a year, when they are allowed to publically unwind. I was at once having an amazing time dancing and laughing with the women and being excited to have felt let into a well-kept secret. Kako's family women cued me into the inner workings of female spaces, which had always seemed private and inaccessible. One of the greatest challenges of my fieldwork was that if you asked about something directly, you rarely got an answer. I had been asking about female-female social networking and music making spaces for months, and had made no progress. I knew that there were women's groups operating in the area, but couldn't get an invitation to one. And until that night, I had no idea about the behavior that women exhibited in front of each other. There were, of course, men out that night, but the bar belonged to the women.

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After seeing Kako's family women dancing and singing in public I became even more interested in the inner workings of women's groups. In Fielmua there are a variety of women's groups. Each family house has a group of women who act in cooperative ways to share resources and divide labor. These women are an informal example of female-female social networking. In addition to these family groups, there are formalized groups run by NGOs which run according to bylaws established to help women save money and take out loans. Candy's group in Tom, the Langtaa Pɔgbɛ, is an example of a formalized group, although they are not affiliated with an NGO. Recognizing that in Dagaraland women without access to formal education have little opportunity for economic and social mobility, the NGO Plan Ghana has established women's groups acting as village savings and loan organizations in the Fielmua area. The development of these organizations has provided an opportunity for women to establish small businesses, to save money for purchasing large items, and exemplifies the formalized strategies of resource sharing and networking between women. In the Fielmua area there are sixteen Plan Ghana women's groups. Each group has a name that either refers to their location in Fielmua, or a name that reflects some aspect of the ideology of the group. The group names are: Puokuu gang, Gya vūūr, Naa gang (chief's section), Ti wontaar (we understand each other), Mwin songti (God helps us), Boo ti ire (what are we doing), Monye (try and see), and Ire kaar (do and see).

Each group is referred to as a Village Savings and Loan Group. The groups have weekly meetings, run by a secretary who records the amounts that members contribute and borrow and directs the meeting. The loans available to members are for three months, with no maximum loan. The members pay back the loan plus 10% interest. At the beginning of the year, each person puts 3 GHC[2] into the common funds. Every week each person adds money for her personal savings account. At the end of the year they redistribute the savings and share the interest accrued through the loans. Additionally, they have a social fund. Members contribute either 20 or 50 pesewas[3] per week which goes towards books, pens, ink, locks for the bank box, and refreshments—items that the group needs to keep running. Once a year the group has a party with money from the social fund.

The members of the group use the loan money for a variety of things. Some members use the money to as a way to establish a profession such as brewing pito or frying sesen. They can use the money as a start up to buy the ingredients and supplies. Others use the money to but millet, corn, or groundnuts from Burkina Faso and bring the goods to Fielmua to sell. Members are free to use the money in whatever ways meet their needs and goals.

In this chapter I explore the song texts of one of the Plan Ghana women's groups. Through these songs Dagara women negotiate the categories of difference mapped on their bodies. They explore such topics as development, changing gender roles, and the racialization of gender ideologies. The group also illustrates that Dagara female resistance is not oppositional. Instead, they are based upon group

[2] 3 Ghana cedis is roughly the equivalent of 3 US dollars.
[3] Roughly 50 US cents.

cooperation, building support networks, community building, and collaborative strategies for attaining resources. Although the group is structured to allow individuals to save and borrow money, each member is dependent upon the entire group. Godfrey's narrative is an example of how Dagara women work with men to strategically collaborate across gender differences for the benefit of the family and community. This type of networking exemplifies the possibilities of transnational feminist alliances that effectively mediate differences, working towards shared goals, and resisting divisive categorization. The women in the group use singing as a means to comment upon the macro-conversations about gender currently taking place, and reveal their own desires and needs.

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Georgina lives in Kankan Duole, a village outside of Fielmua. Knowing that I was interested in the women's groups in the area, she invited me to attend the annual party for her group. One of the group's secretaries came and picked me up from my house on his motorcycle, and took me to Kankan Duole. When we arrived the women began singing a welcome song. I observed as the women drank pito and sang and danced. I wanted to learn more about the song repertoire and the group, but I knew that the women had already spent their social funds, and I couldn't ask them to throw another party. I spoke with Godfrey, one of the secretaries for the group, and asked him if it would be all right for me to throw a party for them so that I could record their songs. He asked the group, and they agreed.

The day of the party, I arrived at the house surprised to see a group of women already waiting for me. When I asked if I could learn about their songs, they had also decided that they should teach me all about "women's work." So before we even began getting ready for the party the women showed me how to mortar the walls of the family home, fetch water, and weave baskets. I was also put in charge of preparing the ingredients for the soup. After spending the morning working, I was sent home to change for the party.

Figure 28: The women's group of Kankan Duole

When I came back, the women spent hours singing and dancing. This is the song I heard as I arrived:

Song 1:

Verse 1:
Ti dɛ bɛ bang kɛ ti na nyɛ ni nirɛ

Chorus:
Wa lang ni ti
Wa lang ni ti
Nir bɛ tɛr fo tiɛro
O wa lang ni ti

Chorus variation:
Wa lang ni ti
Wa lang ni ti
Nir bɛ tɛr fo tiɛro
O wa zi ni fo

Verse 2:
Ti na yɛl a ko Naamwin song o nyɛ tome

Verse 1 variation:
Ti mi dɛ bɛ bang kɛ ti mi na nyɛ ni nirɛ

Verse 3:
Ti na yɛl a ko Naamwin song o zanɛ vula

Verse 4:
Ti na yɛl a ko Naamwin song o zanno minga kyaa kyiri

Verse 4 variation:
Ti na yɛl a ko Naamwin song o zanɛ vula ti nyɛ tome

Translation:[4]

Verse 1:
We didn't know that we will see someone

Chorus:
Come be with us
Come be with us
If someone doesn't have you in mind they won't come be with us

Verse 2:
We will tell God to help her see work

Verse 1 variation:
We were also not aware that we will see someone

[4] The translations for these song texts was done by myself and Jacob Kolekang.

Verse 3:
We will tell God to help her study well/hard

Verse 4:
We will tell God to help her studies continue

Verse 4 variation:
We will tell God to help her study well/hard to see work

Chorus variation:
Come be with us
Come be with us
If someone doesn't have you in mind they won't come sit with you

As the women sang, they danced two styles of Dagara female dances, *nuru* and *kaare*. Both styles are accompanied by hand clapping and occasionally by drumming. The women's group did not have a drum, and so one of the members beat upon an empty plastic bucket used to pour the pito. Kaare dancing is characterized by two women entering the center of a circle and dancing with each other. Nuru is danced by a group of women picking up and throwing another member into the center of the circle. Both male secretaries also joined the dancing. When the women became tired we drank and ate. After the meal of light soup[5] with goat, they began singing and dancing again.

[5] Light soup is a spicy, tomato based soup.

Figure 29: Georgina dancing nuru.

Figure 30: Godfrey dancing nuru

Figure 31: Nuru

Figure 32: Kaare

Figure 33: Kaare

Figure 34: Singing and drumming on the pito container

I was initially surprised to see men in a position of authority in the women's group. During the course of the evening Godfrey spent a lot of time talking with me

about the group. I was curious how he got involved and why he thought it was important to be a member of a women's group. Godfrey's father had passed away, and being the oldest family male family member he is responsible for taking care of his mother and his younger siblings as well as his wife and children. He explained to me the importance of cooperation in Dagaraland. Although Godfrey had been to secondary school, his options for mobility are limited because of the family structure. If he chooses to pursue a career path that takes him away from Fielmua, his family will be left with no one to care for them. Godfrey explained that family success requires everyone to work together, to support each other. I remember on another occasion Godfrey and I were sitting in my house when he got a phone call from his wife. She said that she wanted to travel the following day to go and see her family. He was cross when he hung up the phone, and frowned at me. I asked why he was upset, and he said that he had already asked his wife to help him in the farm the next day. He said that she knew they were supposed to help each other, that they depended on each other. Godfrey's participation in the women's group is an extension of the informal support networks maintained in families. The purpose of the group is to support women who have limited access to resources. None of the women in the group have had access to systems of formal education. The secretaries are men who have been to school, and therefore are able to read the Plan Ghana materials and to act as accountants for the group. Initially I was surprised to see men in a power position within the group. Over time, as I got to know Godfrey, and deepened my understanding of Dagara female social resistance, it became apparent that women are not acting in direct opposition to male power. Both male secretaries

are acting in cooperative ways with women to build support networks that not only benefit individual members, but the community as a whole. As the women sang in the welcome song, "Nir bɛ tɛr fo tiɛro/O wa lang ni ti, If someone doesn't have you in mind they won't come be/sit with us." At the time my interpretation was that the women were welcoming me to their meeting. The verses of the song ask God to help the visitor "see" work, to tell God to help the visitor study hard, and that the result of the studies will be for the person to "see" work. Dagara pronouns are not gendered, so the pronoun "o" refers to he and she. Upon further reflection the women could have just as easily been welcoming Godfrey, who brought me to the party.

Based on my experiences with Dagara women from across a range of socio-economic classes, I understood that men often acted in ways that were perceived as restrictive and that inhibited women's opportunities. Both Candy and Georgina had outlined for me that men often abused their positions of power to control women. This happens in a variety of ways, but for Dagara women, one of the most detrimental ways is limited a woman's access to finances. If a man does not provide his wife with enough money to purchase food products, clothes for herself and the children, and household necessities, she has limited recourse. Particularly for women without professional careers, who have not had access to formal education, their options for financial autonomy are extremely limited. Based upon "traditional" cultural gender ideologies it is the place of the man in a marriage to provide his family with their basic needs. His inability or refusal to do this also reflects badly upon him, as status is also tied to how one's wife/wives and children are dressed and how their hair is done. In fact, men mockingly refer to certain inexpensive

hairstyles as “security man’s wives” because only the lowest paid men would allow their wives to be seen in such a condition. Men are expected to provide their wives with enough money to present themselves in a way that reflect upon their status. This is achieved through hair styling, clothes, jewelry, and general appearance. Men refer to women who are not well kept as “basa basa,” which means someone who is just thrown together without taking care of their presentation. As important as someone’s appearance is, hair and clothes are a luxury beyond basic necessities. Women without personal income, whose husbands do not give them adequate amounts of money will not be able to afford such things.

Not all men are inadequate providers, nor are all men people who choose to abuse power positions. Godfrey exemplifies someone who is working with women in order to strengthen the community. When the women sing, “If someone does not have you in mind they won’t come be/sit with us,” they could easily be referring Godfrey’s commitment to their collaborative strategies of attaining resources. In this context, singing “if someone does not have you in mind” could mean that the person understands the local conditions and needs of the group and of women. It also suggests a sense of common purpose, a cooperative effort towards group success. My interpretation of verse one “We didn’t know that we will see someone,” points to a power differential between the visitor and the group members. Other songs also indicate the group’s desire for help and support. The other verses of the song could equally refer to Godfrey: “We will tell God to help her/him see work,” “We will tell God to help her/him study well/hard,” “We will tell God to help her/his studies continue,” and “We will tell God to help her/him study well/hard to see work.” In

my initial interpretation of the song as a welcome to me, it makes sense that the women were referring to my studies/my research project, which they knew I was engaged in. However, the possibility that they were also referring to Godfrey makes more sense in the context of the community. When Godfrey works hard, or "sees work," the community and his family are also going to benefit.

The relationship between Godfrey and the women's group illustrates that women are not acting in opposition to men, but are engaged in community and family building strategies which include men, and benefit from men's cooperation. Like Georgina and Candy, who re-defined resistance in seeking pleasure, joy, and acting out of personal needs and desires, the women's group is also expanding the possibilities of resistance to include group strategizing across gender differences. Although from one perspective Godfrey occupies a position of power within the group, from another perspective he is occupying a role that benefits the whole, and from which he does not directly benefit. Obioma Nnaemeka cautions feminists from assuming that African women's strategies of resistance will be against men, but are rather often comprised of men and women working together against individualism.[6] She terms this feminism of negotiation, *nego-feminism,* which also means "no ego feminism." African women's willingness to work cooperatively with men is an example of both "no-ego," as in, not individualistic, and also a strategic negotiation across the power differential.[7] Nnaemeka cites Cameroonian writer, Calixthe Beyala, who wrote, "'Soyons clairs: tous les homes ne sont pas des salauds' (Let's face it, all

[6] Obioma Nnaemeka, "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29 no.2 (2003): 257-385.
[7] Ibid.

men are not bastards)."[8] This implies, of course, that some men are bastards, but according to Nnaemeka, the willingness to make the distinction, and to strategically mediate across gender differences in order to attain group desires is a distinguishing feature of African feminist thought and action.

In the second song the women discuss another aspect of community building: the importance of not undermining each other's efforts. Kosagr often spoke to me about this community problem; whenever an individual appears to be becoming more successful or powerful than his neighbors, people will try to "spoil" it for him. The women echo this sentiment, but reframe the question, asking: "Who is on this earth that bad has not reached?"

Song 2:

Verse 1:
A tengzu ka nirbɛ tɛr nirfaa nirvula
Nirbɛ tɛr nirfaa nirvula
Fo deme mi na wan beo

Chorus:
Aaa aano be a tengzu ka faa bɛ ta-o?

Verse 2:
Fo deme na wana
Fo de fo gbɛr tɛbi page

Verse 3:
Tɛbi tɛbi page kɛ yɔ bangnɛ fo tɔ deme

Verse 4:
Fo de na wana fo demiili fo tɔsob

Verse 5:
Fo de miili a fo tɔsob ɛ yi bangnɛ o yirfaa

[8] Calixthe Beyala, *Lettre d'une Africaine à ses surs occidentals* (Paris: Spengler, 1995), 7.

Verse 6:
Gɛgɛra a wa be a fo yir fo wɛna

Verse 7:
A miili fo tɔsob beo kanga na ta na yaa

Verse 8:
O waa lɛ na yelle o tɔ yelle

Verse 9:
A na ta na baar fo yɛl yɛlbir vula ko o

Verse 10:
Fo na yɛl a ko o de lɛb ti zine teng

Verse 11:
O de lɛb ti zine teng
Beo yɛɛ o ko lɛ yie

Verse 12:
O na zine na yaa
Aa be a tengzu faa bɛ ka?

Verse 13:
A tengzu ka nirbɛ tɛrnir yelle na a lɛ

Translation:

Verse 1:
On this earth, humans have bad people and good people
Humans have bad people and good people
Your own will come tomorrow

Chorus:
Who is on this earth that bad has not reached?

Verse 2:
Your own will come
You take your legs, step and cover

Verse 3:
Step, step, cover that you go out and narrate another's problems

Verse 4:
Your own will come and you want to take and mix yours with others

Verse 5:
You take and mix yours with others and go out and narrate the problems of his house

Verse 6:
If a talebearer is in your house you have so many problems

Verse 7:
You mix yours with others, tomorrow another will come

Verse 8:
He is whispering another person's problems

Verse 9:
When it is over you will tell good words to him

Verse 10:
You will tell it to him, take to sit on it

Verse 11:
He takes, sits on it
Tomorrow will come, he won't go out again

Verse 12:
He will sit on it
Who is on earth without problems?

Verse 13:
On this earth if a person doesn't have support it is his problem

Throughout the song's verses the women appear to be discussing the problems of gossiping about other people's lives, noting, "If a talebearer is in your house you have so many problems." In the Fielmua area, I frequently heard people discuss the problems of surveillance and gossiping. The size and relative lack of mobility within the community make it difficult to maintain a private life. It was common for me to listen to one friend narrate the details of someone's personal circumstances, providing commentary on how the person went wrong. This song instructs people

to be careful about such gossiping, because the storyteller also has a private life that is played out in public. The final verse of the song deepens the warning slightly, "On this earth if a person doesn't have support it is his problem." Since everyone is subject to community surveillance and scrutiny, if you choose to broadcast the private lives of others, you risk isolation.

The third song addresses the group as a means to obtaining support, but also as a space that is somehow different or contrary to traditional group networking. By highlighting that "the world is not still as it was," the women are suggesting that in a globalized, postcolonial landscape, it becomes more necessary to engage in formalized networks. They are also pointing to shifts in gender roles. Formalized village savings and loan organizations redistribute money and autonomy. Where as women were at one time entirely dependent upon their husbands to provide for them, they now have access to groups that encourage them to retain partial financial autonomy.

Song 3:

Verse 1:
Pampana na tengzu ka
Tem ma na zanne ti yang
Ti mɛ de ti nuuri yang ti pɛrɛ zini a tema na wɛ
Song fo tɔsob, Gobɛna paa mi song fo yoo
Teng bɛ kyaa, ar teng aro ɛ

Chorus: repeat verse 1

Verse 1 variation:
Pampana na tengzu ka
Tem ma na zanne ti yang
Ti mɛ de ti nuuri yang ti pɛrɛ zini a tema na wɛ
Song fo tɔsob, Gobɛna paa mi nyɛ mi song fo yoo
Teng bɛ kyaa, ar teng aro ɛ

Verse 2:
Bɛ na laar ni na
Bɛ na laar ni na
Bɛ na laar ni na
Gɛgɛra na laar ni na

Chorus: repeat verse 2

Verse 3:
Ni mɛ wa kpiɛr a ni yir
Wontaar bɛ wa ka be a
Songtaar bɛ wa ka be a
Nongtaar bɛ wa ka be a
Gɛgɛsɛla na laar ni na

Chorus: repeat verse 2

Ending:
Gɛgɛra ko laar ni bii?

Translation:

Verse 1:
Now on this earth
We will learn from ourselves
If we fold our hands and sit, we will lose
Help your fellows, the government will also help you
The world is not still as it was

Verse 1 variation:
Now on this earth
We will learn from ourselves
If we fold our hands and sit, we will lose
Help your fellows, the government will also see and help you
The world is not still as it was

Verse 2:
They will laugh at you
They will laugh at you
They will laugh at you
Hypocrites will laugh at you

Verse 3:
If you are living in the family house
If you don't listen to each other

If you don't help each other
If you don't love each other
Black hypocrites will laugh at you

Ending:
Won't the hypocrite laugh at you?

This song directly addresses the need to be an active participant in developing one's community. Rather than "fold your hands and sit" waiting for help, community members must work for themselves if they hope to get support. By working for each other and for themselves, they believe that the government will then recognize their efforts and also contribute. It was very common to hear people discuss helping oneself as a means to obtaining outside support. These groups are designed specifically to empower women and to contribute to community development. The women note that the "world is not still as it was;" not only are gender roles shifting, but all forms of change are part of development. One cannot continue to live as though nothing is changing; if you do not adapt to fit your circumstances, you will be left behind. Verse 2 and 3 illustrate that by engaging in such a group other community members might laugh at you. Verse 2 concludes with the line "hypocrites will laugh at you," and Verse 3 includes the modifier "black hypocrites will laugh at you." I was especially curious about the racialization of hypocrites here. My interpretation pointed to a colonialist mentality that suggested that "black" was aligned with uncivilized, backwards, or unprogressive attitudes or behaviors. Indeed I regularly heard people refer to themselves as "Enlightened" to indicate their literacy and status of education. In the same vein, they would dismiss someone as an "illiterate" when they wanted to denounce what they perceived as negative

behavior or attitudes. The usage of the word "Enlightened" reflects a valuation of a Western lineage of knowledge production. In other contexts Western is conflated with whiteness, thus suggesting the connection between African-ness and blackness. Interestingly, the regulatory tactic of dismissing outside behaviors in women by suggesting they are "behaving like white women" reverses the association of whiteness/Westerness. When I asked about the usage of "black" in the context of the song, and as a modifier to hypocrite, I was told that it means "typical." Although the word *sɛla* unequivocally means "black," the connection to "typical" might also point to a person of unenlightened status. It is possible that the women are reclaiming the "behaving like white women" trope, which serves to restrict their actions and attitudes, by singing that "black hypocrites" will criticize your attempts to change and engage in development. Perhaps this is a radical alignment of the goals of the women in the group and those ideological systems that are dismissed as "Western." If shifting gender roles are ideologically connected to Western-ness, as well as the globalization of international human rights standards which inform Ghana's national policies, then by embracing those changes, the women in the group are conceptualizing of themselves as participating in a global network of women.

Songs 4, 5, and 6 directly address the group as both a positive and negative experience. Song 4 likens the group to the head of a spitting cobra:

Song 4:

Verse:
Kpaaro na kpaaro na
Gbaa zunu ti nyɔg o o
Ni wa bɛr ona dong na
Ni kyaa nyɔg tɛr o kyaa dong

Chorus: repeat verse

Translation:
This group, this group
We hold the head of the spitting cobra
If you stop it will bite
You still hold, it still bites

My interpretation of this text suggests that whether good or bad comes from the group experience, you must maintain your efforts in the group in order to achieve a positive outcome. Similarly song 5 demonstrates that working within the group is not easy, nor is it always "sweet."

Song 5:

Verse:
Kpaaro biiri, kpaaro na
Piilu daar nomɛna
Ti mi dɛ bɛ bang kɛ lɛ kɛ yag yag kpɛ

Chorus:
A kpaaro za poɔ tuo ni a nuo za bɛn be
Ti mi dɛ bɛ bang kɛ lɛ kɛ yag yag kpɛ

Translation:

Verse:
Groups members, the start of every group is always sweet
We didn't know that it would be like this when we entered

Chorus:
In every group there is suffering and enjoyment
We didn't know that it would be like this when we entered

The women are saying that when the group began, they thought that everything within the group would be "sweet," or pleasurable, and that they would not have to

work. The impression of the women was that when Plan Ghana came and established the groups they would be given money for participating in the group. As they spent time in the group they realized that they were working for themselves. Ultimately the efforts they have put into their success makes the outcome sweeter. The hard work or the "suffering" is balanced by the rewards of the group. By suggesting that they did not expect to work for their benefits, the song eludes to the power imbalance between the establishing organization, Plan Ghana, and the rural women. They expected that the NGO, which is linked to an internationally based human rights social agenda, would provide for them without their contributions. The indication that the experience of being in the group is worth the effort is found in song 6.

Song 6:

Verse:
Kpaaro nomɛna a kpaaro na
Yang vɛ ti yangza yi sāāh

Chorus:
N yɛbi kpaaro nomɛna
A kpaaro na yang bɛ na
Ti yaga za yaya bɔri
N yɛbi kpaaro nomɛna

Translation:

Verse:
The group is sweet
Because of this group our minds are clear

Chorus:
My relatives the group is sweet
If not because of this group
Many of us would have grown mad and got lost
My relatives the group is sweet

Although the initial expectations of the group were not met, ultimately the experience of being in the group is providing women with new resources and a means to help themselves. The word, "sweet" is commonly used to mean pleasurable. Both the benefits of the group and the experience of cooperation between the women are sweet. "If not because of this group/Many of us would have grown mad and got lost," suggests that the group offers solutions to problems that the women were not previously able to find answers to.

In song 7 the women further elaborate upon these themes, and explicitly ask for help.

Song 7:

Verse 1:
Zie liɛba zie liɛba
A pɔgbɛ zie liɛba
Ti bobr a song-fu

Chorus: repeat verse 1

Verse 2:
Ni ta guree yee
Ni gur to bufufu

Verse 3:
A pɔgbɛ ko song taar zina
Bɛ na tan sɔgɔ ko nyɛ tome

Verse 4:
Pɔlbile ko nyɔg taar zina
Bɛ na tan sɔgɔ ko nyɛ songfuɛ

Translation:

Verse 1:
The place is turning, the place is turning
The women's place is turning

We want help

Verse 2:
Don't sleep
You always oversleep

Verse 3:
The women won't help each other today
They will reach a time they won't see work

Verse 4:
Young men won't come together today
They will reach a time they won't see help

As the world continues to shift and change, it is the responsibility of each individual to expand your ideas and actions. The women sing, "The place is turning, the place is turning/The women's place is turning." This explicates that the world is shifting and specifically women's lives are changing. The word "place" could both refer to the physical location of Dagaraland, as well as women's conceptual place within it. It is interesting that they chose the word place and not either "work" or "customs." "Women's work" is the term used to refer to the gendering of labor, which also relates to ideologies of action and behavior. "Women's customs" or "ways" indicates the practices that women engage in. When I wanted to explain to people my purpose of being in Dagaraland, I usually told people I was there to study women's customs in order to indicate those practices that extend beyond work and into female social conditions. The word *zie* "place" means physical location, but also the environment. For example, you can say *a zie tolɛna*, or "the place is hot." I interpret the usage of place in the context of the song to indicate the changing socio-political landscape. The women conclude verse 1 by singing, "we want help." By directly asserting that

they desire assistance after stating that the social conditions of women's lives are changing, they are asking for help in order to accommodate the shift in reality.

The third and fourth verses return to the theme of cooperation among community members. The third verse addresses women specifically, "The women won't help each other today/they will reach a time they won't see work." The importance of "seeing" work was discussed in the first song as well. Here, the women note that by emphasizing individuality they will not be able to adapt because the "place is turning." Within the changing social context, women should help each other. The Plan Ghana women's groups are an example of how individuals who work together as a unit benefit personally. Although the women come from different families, by pooling their resources, they are able to earn individual incomes by starting businesses, trading in the market, and saving money for themselves and their families. Without the group, however, the women would not have the resources to achieve individual success. In this context, the verse is clarified; if they do not make collaborative efforts today, at some point none of them will "see work."

In the final verse, the women bring men back into the conversation. "Young men won't come together today/they will reach a time they won't see help." This extends the conversation beyond the women's group into the community as a whole. Not only is the women's place turning, but the globe is turning, and every community member should recognize the need to find mutual support. Here, the women also reiterate a theme found in Song 1; women's strategies of resistance and resource building are not construction in opposition to men. Both men and women

are working against economic marginalization, and towards increased opportunities and mobility. Although the women's group addresses the specific needs of women in the community, those women are operating within family structures. Godfrey exemplifies the centrality of family building and community building. Godfrey's wife and his mother are members of the women's group. Their ability to save money individually will benefit the family as a whole. His efforts to sustain the group, and to aid the women in achieving individual success will impact the entire community.

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Ultimately, the members of the women's group demonstrate how Dagara women are actively bridging the gaps between all of the differences mapped on their bodies. And on all bodies. Demarcations of belonging are used to define group membership, to assert ethnic identity, and to celebrate cohesion. They are also mobilized to regulate bodies that transgress social norms. These songs discuss the mediation of such divisive categories. Song 1 offered a perspective of negotiating across categories of gender assigned to the sexed body, in order to achieve group goals. Song 3 included the text, "hypocrites will laugh at you," and then "black hypocrites will laugh at you." I suggest that by racializing the people criticizing the group, the women are addressing how gender ideologies are racialized in Dagaraland. They are mediating the categories of black/white, African/Western, and traditional/modern by suggesting to the listener, that although black hypocrites will laugh at you, participating in the group is a positive experience. By not aligning development and change with Western/white ideologies, the women straddle the divide between

restrictive and fictive categories of belonging. It is in the mediation and negotiation of all the categories of difference that Dagara women locate themselves. Here they are working across racial and gendered differences. They recognize the "place is turning," which requires them to redefine the boundaries of the body and the cultural meanings attached to it.

The women who participate in the Plan Ghana women's group are subject to regulation based on their lack of access to all formalized structures of power. Thus they are affected both by the regulation put in place by ethnic, gender, and racial parameters, and the state's policies of gender equity. As the state restructures "traditional" ideological systems by implementing gender equity policies, those who see this as an attack on cultural practices hold more firmly to notions of authenticity and "African-ness." The women whose bodies are most affected by this battle for defining boundaries are those who have no voice defining for themselves who they are and who they wish to be. These songs texts demonstrate that rural Dagara women are cognizant of the macro-conversations that occur around them and without them. Organizations such as Plan Ghana are intended to empower women and to provide economic options. The women in Kankan Duole are singing about how their lives have been affected by the group, what they have learned, where they are going, and the relationships between women and men. They also comment on their perspectives of the differences and sameness of seemingly divergent feminist goals. Through their song texts, Dagara women illuminate the politics of sisterhood and solidarity, and the legacies of colonialism. Ultimately, they reveal their participation in global networks of feminist experience and action.

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Weeks after the party all of the women in my house were sitting on the veranda. The weather was hot, but in the evening it was cooled by the breeze. I was listening to my recordings from the party, asking the women in the house for clarifications and explanations of song texts. I honestly don't know where any of the men were that night, but Fatima, Christy, our neighbor Vivian, and I sat outside listening to the music for the longest time and drinking mugs of tequila that had been brought to me as a gift. The little girls in the house, Sekina and Bernice, poked their heads out of one of the doors giggling to watch us. We danced kaare in our yard that night, just the women, drinking, dancing, and laughing. In our house, even though we weren't a family, we always called ourselves a family. We obeyed the rules of a family by sharing food, helping with the labor, and watching each other's children. Fatima never cooked anything without bringing some in a bowl to my room. When Fatima and James went to the farm, Christy went too. In return she collected some of the crop. In the time I was in Fielmua, every evening the house people sat outside on the veranda, the men reading or listening to the radio, the women cooking and washing bowls. During my last week in Fielmua Fatima, Christy, and I went to the market and bought matching cloth to sew matching dresses for the three of us and Mama. On my last night, we wore our matching dresses to the bar to celebrate.

●CONCLUSIONS●

"…knowledge never exists beyond the contexts in which it is used…"
--Veit Erlmann[1]

I am always struck by the capacity of human beings to change. As soon as we are ready to define something or someone there is always a shift, ready to surprise us and cause us to rethink. Throughout this work, my process of understanding how Dagara women experience life within cultural parameters was fluctuating; I was asked to constantly question that which I thought I knew and be open to new ways of knowing. I set out to weave women's voices together, to consider their desires and goals, and to learn what is most valuable to them. Forced to reconcile the ideological dichotomies between what is African and Western, black and white, traditional and modern, I struggled to know how Dagara women mediate these categories. My answers came in observing the way women utilize their bodies and voices.

At the onset of this project I was devoted to dismantling the monolithic construction of the African female subject. Theoretically informed of the problems and dangers of representing African women through "Western eyes"[2] I was prepared to focus on the individual lives of Dagara women. Louise Meintjes discusses the difficulty of writing about embodiment without homogenizing bodies in action:

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[1] Veit Erlmann, *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

[2] This is a reference to Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes," in Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 17-43.

> I am looking for ways to keep present both individual bodies and the character of the body as it is rendered within a particular performance practice while integrating a political dimension into the analysis. Analyses of embodiment run the risk of abstracting (and extracting) bodies and voices into a single idea of 'the body' and 'the voice' in the move to make connections into the world of politics…[3]

Likewise, I found myself anticipating Dagara women to act in similar ways or to speak about themselves using identical language. When I met Georgina, I had already created an expectation of her goals and patterns of behavior based on my interactions with Candy, and the language Candy used to describe herself. From an exterior perspective these women's social conditions are the same. Neither Candy not Georgina had access to a formal education, they are both female gyil players who grew up with fathers and brothers as xylophonists, both live in rural Dagaraland and are active in women's groups. However, the actuality of their experiences demonstrates that although their social conditions are similar, their interpretation and interaction within those conditions are quite different.

None of the individuals I knew in Dagaraland had the same relationship to their body, nor did they find identical ways of using their bodies to subvert systematic regulation. What was consistent throughout my interactions was that people are aware of the cultural parameters that they are asked to live within. My friend Rejoice said it best when she so poignantly referred to the "animal called culture." The relationship that I had with her was different from all of my other relationships. She and I occupied this space where we saw each other, and we saw

[3] Louise Meintjes, "Shoot the Sergeant, Shatter the Mountain: The Production of Masculinity in Zulu Ngoma Song and Dance in post-Apartheid South Africa," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13 no. 2 (November 2004): 176.

how everyone else saw us. I knew that my whiteness, my outsiderness, had caused her harm; her husband couldn't reconcile her "acting white" with Dagara cultural practices. Ultimately, those demarcations of belonging are reductive. Human beings are more expansive than the cultural codes inscribed on their bodies, although those codes shape how bodies are understood.

As individuals make sense of those cultural codes differently, they find strategies of resistance that transgress reductive and ahistoric notions of what constitutes authentic cultural behavior. People like Alexis demonstrate that the fictive boundaries of African and Western are traversed through the reinterpretation of cultural signs. When Mrs. C. A. Bob-Milliar asked "Why is equality only for white women" she pointed to the regulatory tactic of assigning ideological systems, goals, and behaviors to binary and divisive categories. This strategy is effective because it undercuts women's ability to desire outcomes that are "Western" such as equality. Although Alexis is able to mediate his position as a cosmopolitan individual, not everyone has access to self-definition. Differently put, not all bodies are regulated equally, and not everyone has the authority to name culture. While some voices are legitimized to speak, others are silenced.

It is not only women's bodies and voices that are subjected to cultural parameters. As both Kosagr and Bosco illustrate, men's bodies are assigned meaning and are also prevented from speaking in a number of ways. Kosagr is regulated by systems of valuation that delegitimize certain kinds of knowers and knowledge. The linkages between literacy and cultural authority reinforce power hierarchies established during colonialism. He was keenly aware of this discriminatory process,

exemplified in his statement that because someone "knows the pen" does not make them more valuable or knowledgeable. Bosco's narrative also points to how concepts of status are operative within the construction of ethnicity. The public performance of culture at the Kakur Bagr festival links concepts of tradition with socio-economic development. The class of educated elite are authorized to determine what constitutes cultural authenticity and how tradition is enacted. Bosco exemplifies an individual working against codified notions of status, which are linked to masculinity, thus offering a counter-narrative that demonstrates alternative ways to enact cultural productivity. By transgressing the established hierarchy of status within an ethnic framework, he provides new possibilities of envisioning Dagara ethnicity.

Within the cultural meanings assigned to bodies, musical performance becomes a space in which these ideological systems can be fruitfully challenged. Rather than verbally articulate resistant strategies, Dagara women reshape cultural narratives through their performing bodies. Female gyil players such as Candy and Georgina demonstrate more expansive possibilities of what constitutes political action. Both Georgina and Candy refer to their gyil performance as "God's gift," and as a source of personal pleasure. Rather than participating in oppositional forms of resistance, these women seek personal fulfillment. Their paths, however, are not identical. Georgina's relationship to Dagara gender ideologies and to how those ideologies are inscribed on her sexed body is manifested in the valuation of female social spaces. For Candy, she identifies herself as doing men's work, and locates her performing body as crossing into the male gendered domain. She asserts that

because she performs as men do, she is able to perform publically in a male space. This extends to dancing the male style of bine. The connection that Georgina and Candy have to their sex bodies and their embodiment of gender ideologies are different. Although they embody resistant and transgressive action differently, they both point to new cultural possibilities. By continuing to act out of the personal desires that make sense for them, they open up spaces for other Dagara women to inhabit.

In addition to re-defining Dagara cultural possibilities through gyil performance, Dagara women's song repertoires point to the mediation of categories of belonging. In these songs, women discuss changing values, shifting political landscapes, and the importance of community and family building. Dagara women participate in both formalized and informal strategies of resistance by actively engaging in women's groups. Candy's women's group, the Langtaa Pɔgbe, and the Plan Ghana women's group in Kankan Duole exemplify female-female social networking as a means to build resources and provide a support system. The groups advocate for social change by providing women with limited economic resources opportunities to benefit from financial independence. These groups are also adapting to a changing political landscape that includes the national policy of gender mainstreaming. As national policy development and implementation collides with notions of tradition, Dagara women negotiate those boundaries through group and individual action.

Georgina and Candy both expressed to me the importance of sending their girl children to school so that they could benefit from structures of power and

autonomy that they did not have the opportunity to participate in. The Minster of Women's and Children's Affairs similarly noted that education is the key to change. If women have access to education, then it becomes more difficult to regulate them because they are provided with more options.

My narrative approach to this project incorporates the recognition that life is not linear, it is winding. And the relationships between people, too, continue to bend and pull, shift and grow. As I approached what I considered to be an understanding of the life and experiences of the Dagara women I know, two events occurred that reminded me of the importance of flexibility and being open to new possibilities. First, Kosagr excitedly called me in December of 2010, during the Kakur Bagr festival, to tell me that there was a Dagara woman from Burkina Faso playing in the gyil competition. Although I cannot currently comment on any of the specifics of this event, and I do not know her personal story, I am fascinated by the possibilities. Why did she decide to engage in such a public performance? How did the community interpret her performance? Did someone invite her? How does she envision her relationship to the gyil? What did Georgina think about her performance? The second event that reminded me of the possibility of change came in the form of a phone call from Rejoice. In the middle of my field research Rejoice's marriage became increasingly strained and culminated in an intervention from the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU), a branch of the Ghana Police Service designed to provide services to victims of domestic abuse. During my research I had asked many people about their perception of DOVVSU and its mission. Many people said that this is another example of Western importations and

ideological restructuring. One of the services of DOVVSU is counseling and reintegration, which Rejoice and her husband took part in. Months after I returned to the United States, Rejoice called me and told me that she has re-enrolled at the university and is pursuing a degree which will allow her new opportunities in her current profession. Delighted, because I knew she had wanted this since I met her, I asked about her husband. She said that he is like a changed person, and she is experiencing a truly happy marriage. I see possibility here, the capacity for new direction. As it turns out, she was correct, like an animal, culture moves. It is alive, and because it is alive it is adaptable and surprising. There is a space for new voices and stories to be heard and old stories to be retold; there is always a place for resistance and revolution.

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